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NEXT GENERATION

Leading edge computer and video games

October 1995

46
new games
reviewed
and rated

Madden's back

Madden NFL '96 aims for primetime on

PlayStation, Saturn, and PC. Can the 16-bit

sports classic repeat in the 32-bit age?

Volume one

10

In 1991, *John Madden Football* for the Genesis redefined the electronic sports genre and quickly became Sega's pre-Sonic killer app. Adults loved *Madden*, and without it, consoles may have remained just kids' toys. *Madden NFL '96* is on page 60

\$4.99 U.S./\$5.99 CAN.





Filled to capacity

A CD-ROM holds 650 MB of data. The discs that will be released this fall containing the PlayStation, Saturn, and PC versions of EA Sports' *Madden NFL '96* won't have a free byte to spare. Compare this to the 2 MB Genesis and Super NES versions that dominated the 16-bit sports arena. **A lot has changed.**

But experienced *Madden* players won't find that the gameplay has changed dramatically. The 300-fold increase in game size is dedicated to EA Sports' quest to duplicate the experience of watching The Big Game on Sunday afternoon TV. Each CD is crammed with 30 minutes of video, 20 minutes of audio, motion-captured player animation, 30 rendered models of real stadiums, stats, and profiles for more than 600 players, and a pre-rendered logo, uniform, and roster for each of more than 100 teams.

The game code itself is not significantly larger than that of *Madden NFL '96*'s 16-bit forefathers.

So will *Madden NFL '96* be the most sophisticated sports game yet?

Possibly.

Is an interactive TV show every bit as attractive as an interactive movie?

Essentially.

So is this the immediate future of interactive entertainment?

Probably.

That is until someone dreams up a **commercially viable** concept that **truly exploits** the *gaming* potential of 1995's systems. And while *Madden NFL '96* will surely thrill sports fans the world over, it's far from being the most that 32-bit processing power and CD-ROM storage has to offer.

The next generation of gaming has only just begun...

NEXT GENERATION

October 1995

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NEXT Generation shares editorial with
EDGE. Hello to Ivy and Amanda, goodbye
to Jeff. Interup — Moocool! — tiny cow.
Taco Bell, you owe us a Texas Taco, dammit!



Is this the end of FMV as we know it?

Tom Zito, president of Digital Pictures, has made more than 20 full-motion video (FMV) based games. In this exclusive interview, he answers the hard questions about this controversial game genre. Why use FMV in the first place? And what is its future?



Do videogames screw you up?

Countless politicians, talkshow hosts, and parenting groups have rallied against the perceived dangers of video and computer games for years. Is there any truth in their claims? NEXT Generation identifies the real health risks involved with videogaming.



Motion Capture

Huge financial and developmental investments are being made in the emerging technology of capturing human movement. This technology will change the way games look forever, so read the full report on how it works and where you'll see it next

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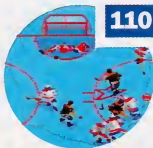
Ultra 64 development hardware reaches select programmers • Sega Saturn games to appear on PC • Bandai announces new Pippin-based console • 3DO's M2 progresses behind the scenes



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EA charges into the 32-bit sports arena with its next generation version of *Madden NFL '96*. Windows 95 gets its first big release with *Earthsiege II*. And, a first look at two new M2 titles



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Motion capture

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Alphas: 11 game previews

The leading edge of computer and video games is right here: *Madden NFL '96* (PlayStation, Saturn, PC), *Loaded* (PlayStation), *Center Ring Boxing* (Saturn), *Star Rangers* (PC), *Earthsiege II* (PC, Win 95), *Ripper* (PC), *Ironblood* (3DO M2), *ClayFighter III* (3DO M2), *Maximum Surge* (PC), *3D Realms* (PC), *Foes of Ali* (3DO)

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Finals: 47 new game reviews

Looking to buy a new game? Trying to decide which system has the best software line-up? Here's your guide, featuring: *Arc The Lad* (PlayStation), *Virtua Fighter Remix* (Saturn), *Wing Commander III: Heart of the Tiger* (3DO), *Mortal Kombat* (PC), *Dust* (Macintosh), *Lunar 2* (Sega CD), *NHL '95* (Genesis), *Civilization* (Super NES), *Alpine Racer* (Arcade)

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NEXT Generation #11 hits the newsstands on October 24, 1995. See for yourself what's coming

SOURCES WITHIN THE PENTAGON CONFLICT WILL OCCUR SOME



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Did we leave out anywhere?

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without going anywhere near the Middle East.

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Digital Pictures is the battle-scarred pioneer of FMV in games. Even when savaged by reviewers, shunned by hard-core gamers, and with *Night Trap* at the hub of 1994's violence uproar, the company has stuck to its guns. But its latest game, *Maximum Surge*, uses FMV in a new way — and, you know what? It's actually quite good. Time to ask Tom Zito, president of Digital Pictures...



is this
the end
of FMV
as we know it?

Game developers the world over are pursuing the elusive goal of trying to create an "interactive movie." But as the majority of game developers get started on their first FMV (full-motion video) based projects, Digital Pictures has been working with video footage for five years.

In fact *Night Trap*, the company's most notorious game to date, was created back in 1987. And when it comes to incorporating real video footage into interactive entertainment, more than 20 FMV titles like *Sewer Shark*, *Corpse Killer*, and *Scottie Pippin's Slam City* have blazed a trail that others are now just beginning to follow.

Except, of course, that the actual games have never been very good. "Looks great, where's the gameplay?" has been the typical reaction to FMV-based games. Is this due to limitations of technology? Bad design? An unavoidable consequence of "interactive video" essentially being a contradiction in terms?

It could now be a redundant argument, because Digital Pictures has moved on. *Maximum Surge*, its latest game (see page 94), blends video-sourced visuals with computer graphics to create a new style of game. It is to *Night Trap* what human beings are to chimpanzees.

Time, then, for a talk about FMV's pros and cons, and whether the FMV games of the bad old days are just some terrible form of videogame adolescence that we've almost grown out of.



games], interestingly enough they say, "This is an interesting video game," and, "Man, the graphics are awesome!" That's what they talk about — the graphics. "It's better than Doom, because they're real people."

NG: "They're real people." Is the real-life look the single biggest advantage of using FMV?

Tom: We think of the camera

as a sourcing device for in-game graphics. Could graphics be done in other ways? Sure. But would they be as effective? Probably not. If you look at *Maximum Surge*, does the experience of playing that game change because you find yourself in a battle with Yasmine Bleeth [the game's lead character, and star of TV's "Baywatch"]? I think it does. Of course, it still needs to be a good game.

If you look at *Quarterback Attack* [Digital Pictures' forthcoming football game], there's no way, in my opinion, that even the best computer graphics or the best polygon-rendering capabilities could do the same job of really simulating what it feels like to be down on a line of scrimmage with eleven 300 lb guys who want to kill you.

NG: But FMV games are notorious for the lack of player control. And a football game with no player control would suck.

Tom: There's an FMV football game that came out from one of our competitors called *Quarterback Challenge*. You were the coach, you decided what play to run, and then just sat back and watched it. Now that's a crappy FMV game.

Now what we've tried to do is say, "What kind of experience can we deliver to a player that he couldn't have without film?" And that's what we deliver in *Quarterback Attack*.

NG: And you believe that video offers a sense of realism that computer graphics never can?

Tom: What we do is put people in worlds that they would otherwise never experience. In *Supreme Warrior*, you actually get a chance to go up against 12 of the best real martial artists in the world. To me, that's a much more interesting place to be than watching myself represented on a flat screen, flailing away at a cartoon.

Sure, it's great to watch the characters in *Virtua Fighter 2* because they are beautiful, they are art creations unto themselves. But you'll never get that fear for your life that you get in *Supreme Warrior* when one of the bodyguards is about to pummel your face.

NG: But even playing an FMV game, you know it's not really real. You still have to muster a significant suspension of disbelief to get over the fact that you're just looking at a TV set in the comfort of your own home.

So if you can make the jump in imagination big enough to get over that, surely you can get into the characters in *Virtua Fighter 2*.



Tom Zito's Digital Pictures produced *Sewer Shark*, the best selling entertainment CD-ROM of all time

Why use FMV?

NG: FMV's got a terrible reputation, right?

Tom: Right. But we've done some really interesting focus groups with gamers. You could say to somebody that we're going to give them a really great FMV videogame to play. They say "So what? I don't want to see it. Full-motion video stinks." But if you don't set out that way, and instead simply show them a good product like *Supreme Warrior* [one of Digital Pictures' earlier

talking



With 20 FMV-based games to its name, Digital Pictures is now using FMV in a new way for *Maximum Surge*

Tom: When you're watching a cartoon or animated character (they are essentially the same thing), there are certain emotions and unavoidable human reactions that you leave at home. Sure, you have all the pride of watching your animated character pummel an enemy into the ground, but there are certain human, gut-reactions that can only be triggered by seeing another human. Real people produce real reactions. And that's what we're after.

For example, I personally, could never really care enough about the Princess Zelda to spend the 40 hours I needed to spend battling through the forest in order to rescue her.

Invisible Graphics

NG: But don't graphics essentially become invisible once you've "got into" a game? Aren't they merely a visual metaphor for the battle of reflexes and strategy between the player and the guy who created the game's AI (artificial intelligence)?

Tom: In the case of computer graphics, maybe. But I believe that film is always new and always stunning. There are visuals that you can deliver using film that you could never in a computer graphics game. You can show things that will be shocked and surprised by. That's what I love about film, the director gives you an experience.

NG: In a film, sure. But when you're playing a game, after a while, you don't really notice the resolution of the enemy. You simply realize that there's an enemy there and you have to kill it.

Tom: OK, so what do you think makes *Dark Forces* a better game than *Doom*?

NG: From a conceptual point of view, the fact that the game takes place in the *Star Wars* universe, a world that we're all familiar with.

Tom: Absolutely. And in my opinion, the best thing about *Dark Forces* is all the little things they do to cheat you into believing that you really are inside a *Star Wars* movie. Because that's where the

emotional resonance of that game comes from. It's the simplest things that they do which I think are brilliantly effective, like they have a guy who sounds just like a Storm Trooper in *Star Wars* saying, "You. Leave this area immediately!" The credits scroll like on the movies, the music's there — they continually remind you that you are in the *Star Wars* universe. And this adds a lot to the game.

Now we, at Digital Pictures, are doing a similar thing with our games. We offer real believable worlds. And because we're using video, we're better at it than even LucasArts.

NG: So how do you explain the fact that games like *Pong*, *PacMan*, and *Asteroids* — games with the most basic of graphics — were such big hits?

Tom: I would answer that with a question. How many people this year went out and bought Activision's *Atari 6-pack* of these old games for the PC? Not many. Sure, the games are terrific: *Pitfall*, *Missile Command*, *River Raid* — but no one wants to play them now. Back then, when they were hits, they were the only games around.

NG: Books don't have fancy graphics, yet books are usually a lot more immersive and compelling than movies of a book...

Tom: Not always. One of my favorite books was the *French Lieutenant's Woman*. And despite John Fowles fighting for years against anyone making a movie of it, eventually a movie was made by Pinter, and I think the movie communicated better what Fowles was trying to accomplish in the book. I admit that this is the exception. Other examples would be *Apocalypse Now* or *Jaws*.

"Stealing Interactivity"

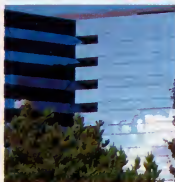
NG: One of the biggest problems with FMV is that showing and moving video about the screen takes up a lot of processing power. Essentially, if you're going to use video, you have to sacrifice some measure of controllability because the player is simply turning on or off different video clips.

Tom: Doing a game like *Maximum Surge*, first and foremost, we sat down and said, "Let's give somebody a good game to play." And then we backed up from there and said, "Where can I steal away certain amounts of interactivity, so that instead, we can immerse people in a world that is so real that they enjoy being in this world a lot more than being in the *Doom* world?"

NG: So how does "stealing away certain amounts of interactivity" translate to gameplay?

Tom: The reality is that in *Maximum Surge*, there is a sequence in which you have to fight your way down corridors, shooting bad guys, hiding behind barriers, and dodging bullets. Now, we have "stolen interactivity" to the extent that you can move forward and backward down the corridor only in four foot increments. In *Doom*, however, you could take steps of just a few millimeters.

How much of a sacrifice or hit have we taken in the game design to do that? I think we know that pragmatically, it's not a whole lot.



In the heart of California's Silicon Valley, Digital Pictures' HQ is the world's center of interactive video

NG: "Stealing Interactivity" is a crucial, key concept here. The easiest and most accepted way of "stealing interactivity" is a technique often used in graphic adventures. For example, your character is in a room and you want him to walk over to a window and open it. In this instance, it's perfectly OK for the player to just click on the window and have the character walk over to the window by himself (it's kind of redundant to make the player have to guide him over to the window manually). In this instance you can "steal interactivity" and cut to some impressive graphics.

But, *Maximum Surge* isn't a graphic adventure, it's an action game. Surely, in an action game, stealing interactivity is perilously dangerous?

Tom: We're sacrificing something in order to give you something else. So what if the next camera step forward is four feet? Instead of giving you a camera step of two feet, I'm giving you another target so that you can kill somebody.

And you can kill that somebody with a degree of payoff. You see a real person. Which you never can see even in *Doom*.

NG: But to create a true feeling of immersion into the game, how the world looks is only half the battle — how it feels to move around in that world is of equal importance.

Surely, to a certain extent, if a player tries to take a two-foot step,



or tries to attack the bad guys from behind, and realizes that he can't — because you have "stolen" that level of interactivity — then the illusion of being in a real world is ruined. The feeling of immersion is shattered instantaneously.

Tom: Sure, and if this game begged in your mind the question "What does the enemy look like from behind?" and you could never see, then sure, it would suck. But we've designed it such that by the time you may think about that, you have new enemies to deal with.

NG: When you talk of limiting the degree of interaction to what is only "useful and interesting," that's not really a choice that you're purposely making, it's a reality forced by the power limitations of the machine. You couldn't provide as much interaction as a game like *Doom* in a FMV-based

game, so to say that you "choose" not to is, perhaps, a little audacious.

Tom: It's a combination of choice and technical limitation. But as it is right now, I think there is more gameplay in *Maximum Surge* than in *Doom*.

The big trade-off

NG: But in trying to provide both graphics and controllability, there has to be some sort of trade off. You can have a great looking game in which every image looks like a photo, or a very simple game over which the player has ultimate controllability. A computer can only do so much work, so you can't have both.

So in trying to provide both great graphics and smooth controllability, there is some sort of trade off between the two. How do you decide where to "steal interactivity" and sacrifice one for the other?

Tom: You base your choice of "how much graphics, how much interaction" on game design choice and experience. For example, in *Quarterback Attack*, we offer an experience that cannot be matched by any other product on the market.

Sure, in our game you can't do something like turning around and running the



other way down the field like you could in, say, *Madden*. You are confined to some preset options. But the question is who would want to run the wrong way down the field? No quarterback in his right mind would do that. So how important is that to the game player? I think it's just a conceptual, hypothetical issue as opposed to any enhancement to the experience of playing the game.

Instead, what we offer is the feeling that you're actually down on a field with 350 lb guys, trying to throw a pass with a sense of verisimilitude. The only basic difference between our FMV-based game and one like *Madden* is that in the other games, you can do things that you would never do in a real football game — and you never fear for your life.

NG: OK, but in a CG [computer graphics] "free space" world like *Madden*, by the time you've picked your formation, picked your play, picked your receiver, maneuvered your quarterback — manually — into the pocket, dodged a tackle or two, and

"I, personally, could never really care enough about the Princess Zelda to spend the 40 hours I needed to spend battling through the forest in order to rescue her"

Can FMV-based games ever be embraced by hard-core gamers? Tom Zito believes *Maximum Surge* could be



Tom Zito was given his break into the game industry by Nolan Bushnell, the founder of Atari and the man behind *Pong*. Digital Pictures' ambition is to produce interactive TV

"There's an FMV football game that came out from one of our competitors. You were the coach, you decided what play to run, and then just sat back and watched it. Now that's a crappy FMV game"

then finally thrown the ball, there's an infinite number of variations. There's a very real chance that every single play is unique and that no one has seen exactly the same play twice. It could be argued that this, therefore, is more "real."

Tom: If you think that all those plays on *Madden* look different, then we have very different definitions of "different." To me, *Madden* looks like a TV screen full of little green ants. So I say, "Look, that ant is a millimeter over to the right this time." Big deal.

Maximum Surge

NG: Instead of simply having a game screen full of video, *Maximum Surge* looks more like a traditional videogame, but with pieces of video replacing computer graphics.

Tom: The look is very distinctive. Basically, we've taken all the targets from the game and sourced them with real people — real video. So you have real Hollywood costumes and you have guys in alien suits, and these are unlike anything an artist or renderer will ever produce.

Maximum Surge is really the first game in which we used the camera as a tool rather than as a recording device. Just as if you were going to create *Doom*, you would go to a SGI workstation and create all the pieces of *Doom* as computer graphics, in *Maximum Surge* we have taken a video camera and done exactly the same thing. We then assemble an image that looks real but, in fact, isn't.

NG: So why the change of direction from "traditional" FMV-based games?

Tom: That's for a couple of reasons, it's partially because the technology now allows us to do this. We couldn't do it, for example, on the Sega CD which was the platform we started out on.

It's partly because as we've learned how to make better and better games — and making good games has always been the goal. If you go back to the early days, was *Night Trap* a good game? I don't know. I thought it was a good game, but a lot of people didn't.

And because we can build on things we've done in the past. For example, in *Ground Zero Texas* we learned how to blow the living bejesus out of an android, we can now create a game where you can blow the living bejesus out of many, many androids in a way that's much less restrictive than it was in *Ground Zero Texas*.

End of FMV as we know it?

NG: Do you acknowledge that you're racing against technology? Won't the processing power of future home consoles eventually produce rendered, on-the-fly computer graphics that equal the resolution of video-sourced or FMV graphics?

Tom: Sure it will. But the rendering technology necessary to make a computer graphics world created on-the-fly anywhere near as realistic as video footage is probably 10 years away from the home. To be able to get a rendered image at a price that makes sense for the home, that can give you the kind of nuance and subtlety that molecules in photographic films can, is way off.

NG: So will you continue to work with video?

Tom: Yes. What we try to do with video is to create an environment where you get caught up in what you're doing, an environment in which you feel like what you're doing makes a difference.

And I think that, at least for me, it's a lot easier to feel like I'm making a difference if a real person is actually talking to me in a context that makes sense given what I've just done. Versus... you

know, I couldn't give a shit about rescuing princess toad stool. That doesn't have any meaning to me.

NG: So Digital Pictures' games have evolved.

From *Night Trap* to *Maximum Surge*, gradually you have managed to do more and more with your FMV raw material. Are the days of the "old FMV" games now over?

Tom: I've got to say I hope so, yes.

ng



In 1993, Digital Pictures signed an interactive video and film contract with the Directors Guild of America

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you want it



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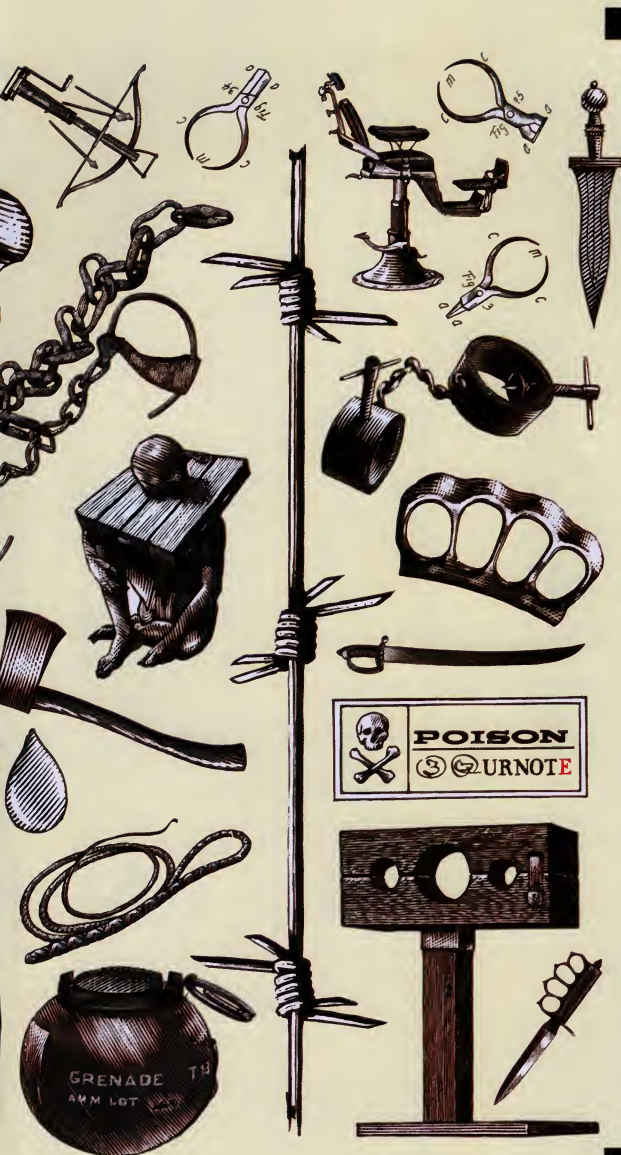
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Power Player: New plans are laid out for Bandai's Pippin/**p.18** • **DVD War:** SD-DVD is Toshiba's and Time Warner's digital storage entry/**p.20** • **InVidea:** Sega secures Saturn-to-PC games/**p.22** • **DWANGO:** WAN play in Joyriding/**p.29**

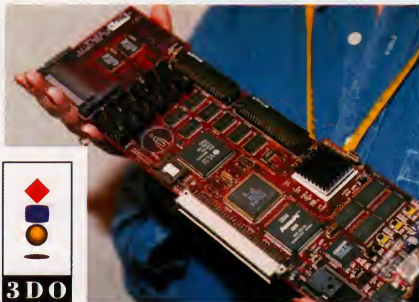


The latest news from around the world of interactive entertainment

3DO's M2 prepares for its debut

3DO is confident that next year's launch of M2 will put it back on top

The progress of 3DO — from pipe dream to would-be global standard to just another 32-bit console — has taken an upswing in the US recently. Panasonic and Goldstar, 3DO manufacturers, have cut the retail price of their machines to \$299, giving them a \$100 advantage over Sega's newly launched Sega Saturn. Not surprisingly, 3DO is now claiming that it is outselling Sega by a ratio of at least four to one.



Work on M2 continues apace, but so far only within the walls of 3DO's HQ Redwood Shores, CA. So far there's no news of a release date or price



Nevertheless, 3DO's lack of quality software releases in recent months has become an area of great concern and has led many people to turn their attention to M2 — the company's second generation machine, which is possibly due for release in early 1996. 3DO proudly boasts that M2 is significantly more powerful than the Saturn, PlayStation, Nintendo's Ultra 64, and even Sega's new ultra high-spec Model 2 arcade board.

Goldstar and Panasonic are both committed to producing final M2 units

Given that the 3DO Mk1 hardware wasn't finished until just a few months before the unit went on sale, M2 appears to be progressing well. A 3DO insider told **NEXT Generation**: "Work on the operating system is going faster than we expected, although a shortage of silicon coming out of IBM has slowed things up slightly." Consequently, the number of functioning M2 development systems is severely limited, and only a



Ironically, 3DO has turned the gaming industry's predilection for "waiting for the next big thing" from 1994's enemy to 1995's ally. Rumors of M2's power have kept many gamers from investing in PlayStation or Saturn

M2 launch software

The following games are scheduled to appear in time for the M2 launch (or thereabouts):

- *Descent* (Interplay)
- *Clayfighter III* (Interplay) — a tongue-in-cheek fighting game.
- *Realms of Valor* (Interplay) — a fighting game that will take advantage of Interplay's TSR license
- *Ironblood* — another fantasy fighting game
- *Disruptor* — also due on 3DO Mk1, a *Doom*-style shoot 'em up (Universal Interactive Studios)
- *Return Fire II* — featuring a brand new 3D engine (Silent Software)
- *Top Gun* — not a PC port but a new version that will apparently make the Ultra 64 version "pale by comparison" (Spectrum Holobyte)
- An unnamed M2-powered arcade beat 'em up (Williams Entertainment)
- *Wing Commander IV* (Origin)
- *John Madden '98, NHL Hockey, Road Rash, Olympic Soccer* (Silicon Dreams)
- *Undecided: Crystal Dynamics, Capcom, Acclaim*

few select companies have received kit that are even approaching final specification. However, 3DO is stressing to developers that more equipment is due to ship soon.

The development system's CPU is currently running at around 50 MHz rather than the intended 66 MHz, and there are a few other small discrepancies yet to iron out, but the system's staggering performance is apparently already evident. According to **NEXT Generation's** source, "Even with early silicon and a version of the operating system that has yet to be optimized, we are already seeing 3D models composed of 450,000 textured and lit polygons running at 30 frames per second. It's incredible."

Not surprisingly, M2 will adhere to the same production philosophy as the first machine — The 3DO Company will develop the format and third party manufacturers will produce and market the hardware. It's still not clear if all licensed 3DO Mk1 manufacturers are committed to manufacturing M2 machines (although Goldstar and Matsushita have already produced mock-ups), but the involvement of other big-name companies (such as Philips and even Sega) has been rumored for months.

On the software front, **NEXT Generation** has learned that at least 15 M2 titles are in development, all scheduled for release around the time of the machine's launch. What's less of a surprise is that the most advanced work in development is being undertaken internally at Studio 3DO in San Mateo, California.



The processing heart of M2 is a custom version of the PowerPC line of chips. It offers top performance, but at what price?

Of most interest to potential M2 owners is a game with the working title *M2 Racing*. This is thought to be a Formula One racer designed by the same team which produced the futuristic racing demo (See **NG 7**) shown at E³ in May. Other projects include a golf game and (at a much more advanced stage of development) a *Zelda* clone which may or may not be destined to arrive on M2 — if Mk1's software shortage continues, it may be needed to bolster the current roster of 3DO games.

Electronic Arts — the one software company to have consistently performed well on the 3DO — is also developing original M2 games, all of them, predictably, sequels to existing titles. All-new M2 version of *John Madden* (the '98 edition, in fact) sounds the most promising, given that it was already a superb game. Another title following the route from the Genesis to 3DO to M2 is *Road Rash*, for which, again, the quality expectations are high. An M2 *NHL Hockey* should also be one of the initial EA titles.

Of the other third party M2 titles uncovered by **NEXT Generation**, the most tantalizing are Silent Software's *Return Fire II* (a sequel to one of the few "must have" games on the 3DO), *Top Gun* from Spectrum Holobyte, and a sequel to Interplay's *Descent*.

But perhaps the most promising aspect of 3DO's M2 strategy is its plan to implement an "arcade business model." So far, Williams/Bally-Midway, Time Warner, and Acclaim are preparing to develop arcade games using the M2 chipset. Williams allegedly has a "Toshinden Killer" in the works, while Acclaim's *Batman Forever* license looks likely for adaptation. 3DO is also courting Japanese coin-op manufacturers, whose industry expertise would undeniably add to the format's credibility.

Sony's Boss Quits

On August 7, 1995, it was announced that Sony Computer Entertainment of America's (SCEA) President, Steve Race, resigned. Race, interviewed in **NG 5**, is rumored to have quit after interdivisional disagreements over the long-term pricing of the PlayStation.

Sony is not surprisingly remaining tight-lipped about Race's sudden departure at this crucial time in the PlayStation's infancy. The official announcement was made from Sony HQ in New York, while employees of SCEA in Foster City, CA closed ranks. "I'd like to talk about this all day," said an insider, "but it's not worth the bullets in the back."

Race's immediate replacement is Martin Homish, previously senior vice president of the Consumer Products Group of Sony Electronics. He's not a gamer, but Olaf Olafson, the president of Sony Electronic Publishing Company commented that "We are very fortunate to have a senior executive within the Sony family with a wealth of manufacturing, distribution, and marketing experience to lead SCEA."

What affects Race's resignation will have on PlayStation is impossible to judge. Probably little in the long run. But it has to be a great boost of morale for Sony's rivals, and proof that in an industry as volatile as the game industry, the pace of change never slows.



Steve Race, ex US boss of SCE, is now the head of Spectrum Holobyte

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breaking

Ultra 64 reaches developers

Nintendo's 64-bit superconsole makes its next step from mere "Project" to gaming "Reality"



Zelda returns

Nintendo's Satellaview system (NG 5) is being used to give Japanese gamers access to a reworked version of *Zelda* (above). Owners of the SFC-based satellite technology will be allowed to download and play various stages of the game for one hour between 6 pm and 7 pm every Sunday for four weeks. After each session, game positions will be saved and when the final hour has elapsed the 50 highest scoring players will each be sent a free memory pack.

The new *Zelda* is based on the game originally released nine years ago on the Famicom disk system. However, there are strong rumors that Shigeru Miyamoto has a new 16-bit *Zelda* nearing completion — something that would give SFC owners just cause for celebration.

Ultra 64 (U64) development systems finally reached Nintendo's "Dream Team" developers in early August. Based on final specifications received by developers, the Ultra 64 offers resolution modes from 320x224 to 1280x1024, 32-bit color, 3 MBs of memory, and a Digital Signal Processor for 16-bit audio and 44.1 kilohertz sampling. The system promises to deliver more than 600,000 texture-mapped polygons per second, realtime anti-aliasing, realtime polygon count reduction, realtime Tri-Linear MIP-Mapped Interpolation (TLMIP), and tri-linear perspective correction.

While still a small step below 3DO's M2 in overall processing muscle, Nintendo's new toy has made the tricky journey from paper to live development hardware on schedule to deliver an unprecedented "below \$250" price-to-performance ratio (and until 3DO announces a realistic price-point for M2, its performance is irrelevant). However, rumors still persist that U64 may not launch — even in Japan — until late 1996, due to a lack of software.

From the outset, Nintendo has insisted upon the cartridge software format as the means by which the main hardware can be kept inexpensive. Consequently, Nintendo has informed licensees that their first games cannot exceed 8 MB in ROM size, an announcement which sent shivers through the development community quickly getting used to the luxury of working with CD-ROMs. This will inevitably lead to developers scaling back their plans.

Another problem is that as **NEXT Generation** understands it, only Acclaim, Virgin, and Williams have been granted actual publisher status for U64. The rest of the dream team are only game developers, and are reluctant to continue work until it is established just who will publish the finished product, and what rights the company will have to port the game to other platforms.

Still, developers such as LucasArts and Square are already



secretly working on cutting-edge software for the Ultra 64, with most of the titles under development hiding behind the vague phrase "3D polygon game." Licensees' nondisclosure agreements are said to be among the most restrictive in the history of the industry, preventing even development staff from discussing the details of unannounced projects with colleagues.

Nintendo's and SGI's innovations, however, do seem to heavily outweigh any birth pangs U64 may be experiencing. Hints of Nintendo's specifications for the machine's "revolutionary controller design" are trickling out slowly to developers. Nintendo's plan includes two separate directional mechanisms — one digital and one analog — on the left and middle of the controller, with buttons on the controller's right side.

The digital joystick will behave traditionally (moving your steering wheel entirely left when you press left, and so forth). Analog control will be more precise, giving your steering wheel a slight turn when you press slightly and a full turn when you press fully to one side.

ng



Ultra 64 has progressed from SGI's emulators (top) to real hardware (middle). But Nintendo's Howard Lincoln (above) refuses to show it off

Nintendo®

Power Player: Mac in a box gets a facelift

Development of Bandai's Pippin-licensed console is proceeding apace



The Power Player's redesigned controller features a directional pad and a trackball, as well as two shoulder buttons and four thumb buttons arranged in a diamond formation

Bandai has revealed the final shape of its Power Player console — the first machine to subscribe to Apple's Pippin format. The original incarnation of the hardware, shown at the Milia '95 show in Cannes, France, was less like a console and more like a hi-fi component (it was also, less flatteringly, reminiscent of the CD-i and CDTV). But by the time the Tokyo Toy Show took place in June the console had undergone a complete transformation. With its subtle curves and sleek, grey finish, it now resembles nothing less than a Macintosh console which could have come straight from Apple's HQ, Cupertino, CA.

The Power Player represents a brave step into new territory for both Apple and Bandai: Not only is it the first fruit of Apple's decision to establish the Pippin license, which enables third party manufacturers to use a stripped-down version of the Mac operating system, but it's also the Japanese toy manufacturer's first serious foray into the hardware sector. (Although its 8-bit CD console, Playdia, seems to have died a quiet death on the shelves in Japan.)



The new looking Bandai Power Player, as shown at the Tokyo Toy Show, complete with the original grey controller (above). Shin Unozawa, general manager of Bandai's Power Player project, said the company is aiming to provide a multimedia system that fills many demands (right)



NEXT Generation visited Bandai's offices in Taito-ku, Tokyo, and spoke to Shin Unozawa, general manager of the Power Player project, about the company's plans for the hardware.

NG: How near is the Power Player hardware to completion?

Shin Unozawa: We're still developing it. The first board, EVT-1, is now finished. We haven't decided exactly what we're going to put inside, but we do know that it's not a game machine like the Saturn, PlayStation, or Ultra 64. We want to produce a new kind of machine using the Apple OS. The Pippin is not even a computer, we want to create a new category. It will use a TV set, a CD-ROM, and a networking device; these three components make it a new type of hardware.

NG: So what exactly will people be able to do with the Power Player?

Shin: Naturally, they'll be able to play Apple games, and it will also be possible to use simple word processors and some art packages. It may be possible to do that without a hard disk but, of course, users will prefer to have the hard disk add-on. We also want the Power Player to be a communication machine — we're thinking of including a Geoport. We've had a lot of advice from Japanese and foreign software developers about what could be done with the communications capability of the Power Player. Some of them are thinking about education — students would be able to do their revision and their university tests using the Pippin.

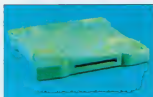
We also want to use it as a karaoke machine — consumers will be able to download whatever song they want. Overall, the Power Player could be seen as a "personal communicator."

NG: Does that mean there will be a Power Player online service?

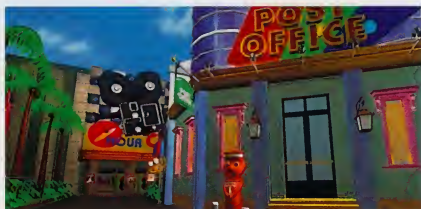
Shin: We want to create a network service, like the Internet. If we don't do that, users will be able to play only Mac software and it'll be just like a Macintosh. We want to add something new to the Power Player. The company Future Pirates has created a network service called Franky Online for PC users, which is accessed with a CD-ROM and a password. This is now up and running in Japan, and users can

"There are 300 Japanese developers participating in the project, and about 130 titles will be available at launch. Around 40 of these will be games"

Shin Unozawa, General Manager of Bandai's Power Player project



An external hard-disk drive will also be made available at launch for the Power Player



Screens from Franky Online, a PC network service created by Japanese firm Future Pirates. It offers a variety of services from shopping to education



shop online, send e-mails, and do a great many other things. Future Pirates is also developing an online service for Pippin users which is going to be cheaper. We also want to simplify the connection and the download system. Phone lines are very slow, and it takes time to download graphics or sounds, so we would like to use a CD-ROM to store them and only download the realtime parameters from the online service. Users will be able to connect easily using a password.

NG: What software is being developed for the Power Player?

Shin: There are 300 Japanese developers participating in the project, and about 130 titles will be available at launch. Around 60 of these will be education software and 40 entertainment software (including games). Bandai will release Power Player versions of games like *Gundam*, *Sailor Moon*, and *Dragon Ball*.

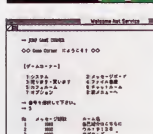
NG: Are there any major game developers onboard, such as Konami, Namco, or Sega?

Shin: There are around 30 developers. Most of them are PC-oriented, but Namco is working on software.

NG: Could you use high-end Macintosh applications on the Power Player — say, *Adobe Photoshop*?

Shin: The latest Japanese version of *Photoshop* needs 12 MB of RAM to run, and the Power Player only has 6 MB. But maybe a special version of *Photoshop* could be produced for the Power Player. But it will be possible to add two, four, or eight megabytes of extra memory, so the total possible memory is 14 megabytes.

NG: How many units will you sell?



Bandai intends to emulate Franky Online for Power Player users

Advertainment

In which NEXT Generation studies the art of videogames marketing. This month: Sega goes ape on Japanese TV

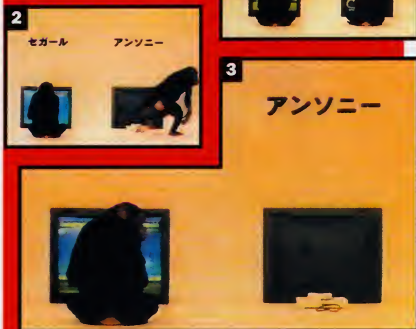
Sega's and Sony's tooth-and-claw struggle for domination of the Japanese high street has spilled over into the arena of TV advertising. In an effort to sway potential PlayStation gamers in the direction of Saturn, Sega Japan recently ran a commercial depicting two chimpanzees abandoning their primal instincts in favor of videogames. Is Sega playing fair, or is this just monkey business?

Company: Sega

Product: Sega Saturn

Date: May 1995

Origin: Japan



1 Two chimps, one called Segal and the other Anthony (very subtle), are playing with their new consoles. The games on screen are just about visible: Segal is enjoying *Virtua Fighter*, while Anthony finds himself passing the time with Namco's PlayStation shooter, *Starblade 2*. Suddenly, having decided that the PlayStation is boring, Anthony gets up, switches off, and wanders away, leaving Segal all alone with his Saturn. 2 Segal glances over briefly but doesn't follow because, of course, he's too engrossed in *Virtua Fighter*. The moral? *Starblade* doesn't come close to *Virtua Fighter*. Strange how Sega didn't pick *Tekken*...

Shin: There are between 500,000 and 600,000 Macintoshes in Japan, and we hope to sell the same number of Power Players in the first year.

NG: And what's the target audience?

Shin: In Japan, the average age of console users is 12 years old, and for computer users it's 30 years old. Our target is around 20 years old.

NG: What if Apple licenses another Pippin manufacturer?

Shin: That's no problem. Even if they release an integrated TV and Pippin, that's no problem for us.



breaking

Heavyweights unleash new DVD contender

Toshiba and Time Warner take on Sony and Philips in the DVD war

Toshiba and Time Warner have demonstrated their contribution to the future of digital storage at a UK press conference. Called the Super-Density Digital Video Disc (SD-DVD), the new format allows a feature-length movie to be stored on one disc and is supported by electronics giants including Matsushita, Samsung, Pioneer, and Hitachi, among others.

A single-sided SD disc can store five gigabytes of data, or 142 minutes of video footage, while a double-sided disc has a capacity of 10 GB — more than 280 minutes. The quality of the picture playback is astonishing, with excellent clarity, color reproduction and registration. However, it wasn't clear whether the DVD players on show were finished hardware or merely mock-ups.

Of more relevance to the game industry was news of a rewritable version of the SD disc, called SD-RAM. With a storage capacity of more than 2.6 GB for a single-sided disc and



Photos courtesy of What Video magazine



Two prototype Toshiba SD-DVD players were displayed, but there were no details given about how much the actual hardware will cost

5.2 GB for a double-sided one, it represents a considerable advance over the 600 MB of conventional CDs.

Meanwhile, development is continuing on the rival DVD system from Sony and Philips. It remains to be seen which format will go the way of Betamax and which will become the industry standard for the next decade. The stakes are high.



Seventeen major consumer electronics companies joined the Toshiba/Time Warner digital video disc camp

Arcade race restarts

Japan's premier arcade companies enter the racing arena once again

Sega has unveiled *Indy 500*, the latest in its line of polygon-generated coin-ops, at an arcade exhibition in Tokyo, Japan.

In terms of graphics, *Indy 500* falls short of the standard set by Namco's

F1 racing game, *Ace Driver*, released last year. Powered by Sega's enhanced Model 2B board (first seen in *Sega Rally*), the visuals are impressive, although they noticeably lack the Gouraud shading of the Namco game. Like *Ace Driver*, though, players can choose from three different circuits, and it will be possible to link up to eight units. *Daytona-style*, when the final version ships later this year.

Namco, not to be outdone by its rival, has also revealed its sequel to *Ridge Racer*, entitled *Rave Racer* (reviewed in NG 9). The new driving game, which is undergoing tests in Japanese and US arcades (and was shown at the September AMOA in New Orleans, boasts superior performance to the original and breathtakingly detailed graphics thanks to Namco's System Super 22 board.

Rave Racer offers several other features: a PlayStation-style external view and three extra tracks. The new courses contain banked corners, jumps, towns and bridges — on the challenging "advanced" course you can even fall off the track.



Sega's latest Model 2 coin-op is *Indy 500*, previewed here at the company's recent New Machine Festival exhibition in Tokyo



***Rave Racer* is Namco's spectacular follow-up to *Ridge Racer*. There are now three tracks and improved graphics**



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breaking

Sega ports Saturn games to the PC

NVidia exclusively secures Saturn games for its Pentium PC multimedia accelerator

Sega Saturn Adapter

Owners of imported Sega Saturns no longer have to worry about the lack of compatibility between different parts of the world. Simply plug in the unofficial Universal Adapter from Date! into Saturn's cartridge slot and switch on the console.

The Universal Adapter enables any Saturn CD to play on any Saturn, from any country. Of course, with the cartridge slot taken up you will have to find another way to save your game data. US consumers can purchase the Universal Adapter through Tommo Inc. Call them on (818) 839 8755.

Tell them NEXT Generation sent ya.

In an exclusive licensing agreement, Sega of America has allowed its Saturn line-up of games to be developed for Pentium PCs equipped with multimedia accelerators based on NVidia's technology. NVidia is a privately-owned, Sunnyvale, CA company, and the developer of the NV1 single-chip multimedia accelerator.

The NV1 chip forms the heart of Diamond Multimedia's VLB Diamond Edge 3D accelerator card (\$299 SRP) as well as future products from a number of other currently undisclosed manufacturers. The Diamond Edge 3D is also available in PCI format, based on the STG2000 media accelerator chip from SGS Thompson.

"We think PC owners will be as excited and engrossed by playing our games on the PC in their home offices



The Diamond Edge series of multimedia accelerator cards from Diamond features the NV1 chip

as our Sega Saturn customers are with the big screen, high-end audio experience in their family rooms," said Sega of America's President Tom Kalinske. Which games will be ported to the PC, however, has yet to be revealed. As well as Sega's Saturn software, Interplay's *Descent*, Domark's *Absolute Zero*, and Papyrus's *NASCAR Racing* kicks off Diamond Edge 3D's software line-up, with more dedicated games promised from other leading developers.

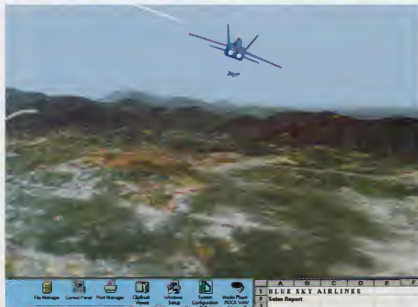
Sega has to view this agreement as a way to yield extra revenues from its software because it lacks the ability of third party game developers to make money from porting its software across all home platforms; the company sees the high-end, \$2,000-plus PC game audience as a market that won't conflict with its plans for Saturn.

Not simply a graphics accelerator, The NVidia chip is a true multimedia accelerator, facilitating enhanced 3D Graphics, 2D Windows acceleration, wavetable audio and video acceleration, providing digital gameport and video acceleration. NVidia claims that its chip achieves a peak rendering performance of 100 million pixels per second.

With the PC multimedia and graphics accelerator board market heating up fast, you should expect the complete guide to powering up your PC in a future issue.



Tom Kalinske, Sega



At the heart of NVidia's NV1 chip's power is its proprietary curve-based polygon rendering technology. The two spheres shown (top) are actually made with the same number of polygons — the one on the right uses NVidia's chip. This frees up processing power for better games (above)

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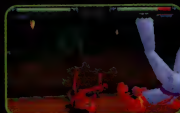
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Arcadia

Coin-operated news and opinion straight from the source, not to mention new coin-ops, too



Marcus Webb is the editor-in-chief of *RePlay* magazine, the US' leading trade amusement magazine

by Marcus Webb



Arcade game-makers can now show their games on Microsoft's Windows 95

We Do Windows

Past and future coin-op videogames from Capcom, Taito, Namco, and other top arcade machine factories will show up on desktop computer, via CDs, for the new Microsoft Windows 95 operating system. Microsoft has created a joint venture called "Gamebank" with Softbank Corp., Japan's leading software distributor, for this purpose. Microsoft chairman Bill Gates and Softbank executives unveiled these plans for all this in Tokyo this past summer.

By the way, Sega's not planning to be a third party supplier to Gamebank. However, Gates did say Microsoft and Sega are "jointly developing an operating system which can be used for both personal computers and Sega's Saturn." The 1995 version of Windows, the world's most popular computer operating system for the PC, was slated for US release in August.



Arcade owners are glad to have an alternative to games like *Dragon's Lair*

Disc-Based Arcade Games: The Few, the Proud

Given the cheaper production costs, enhanced storage capacity, low-heat efficiency, and physical convenience of CD-ROMs and laserdiscs, why aren't more arcade games already using this format? Partly because the original laserdisc games were mechanically unreliable (like *Dragon's Lair* in 1982), and arcade owners have notoriously long, unforgiving memories regarding this sort of thing.

However, with home videogames increasingly going to disc formats, and with new, longer-memory audiovisual CDs coming in 1996 from Time Warner and Philips/Sony, arcade videogames may eventually begin drifting in this direction. In the meantime, here is a look at the current crop of disc-based arcade games.



ALG's *Fast Draw Showdown* builds on *Mad Dog McCree's* success

Draw, Pardner!

American Laser Games is the clear leader in its field. The company started a few years ago with big-screen laserdisc games which could truthfully

be described as fullblown interactive movies, including elaborate sets, costumes, live actors (captured in realtime and speaking scripted dialog), plus special effects. Today, ALG has 6,000 laserdisc games in the field worldwide. The platform has supported live-action hits like *Mad Dog McCree* and *Who Shot Johnny Rock*. Their latest laserdisc title, *Fast Draw Showdown*, pits you in a quickdraw contest, using a replica six-shooter, against a gallery of cowboy gunslingers. The game measures and displays your actual shooting time in hundredths of a second. Among your opponents is the world's fastest real-life quickdraw artist, Wes Flowers.

Now ALG has come up with a special arcade adaptation of the 3D0 platform, using CD-ROMs for both live-action and computer graphics arcade games. (To our knowledge ALG is the only arcade game factory to use the 3D0 platform in arcades.) Their newest CD-ROM title *Orbata*, enables you to choose your character who then morphs into an orb. You use trackball controls to compete against the opposing player's orb while racing around inside a raised, level roller-derby arena. The object of the game is to try to push the other guy into various openings for a long free-fall. You can also crash your orb into his, breaking his orb open, and forcing the character out onto the arena floor, where he's vulnerable to getting run over by your orb!

The game features ALG's first use of 100% computer-generated graphics, done by in-house programmers. Look for this one in arcades by late August or early September. Also on CD-ROM are several of ALG's fun live-action titles like *Fast Draw Showdown*, *Mad Dog II*, *Crime Patrol*, and *Shoot Out in Old Tucson*. ALG will continue making titles for both hardware systems. A new CD-ROM system, expected by mid-1996, will combine the best of both, offering enhanced live-action characters within 3D polygon computer graphics environments via digital compression.

TWI: Bad Boys

Time Warner Interactive also made good use of the live-action capabilities of laserdisc with *Cops*, a big-screen sitdown driving/shooting game based on the hit TV series. It features actual footage shot on location in Los Angeles with stunt drivers and real life police officers (and the famous theme song: "Bad boys, bad boys, whatcha gonna do when they come for you?"). Game mode ranges from a training course, to a high-speed night chase, sniper alley, and more. The company also has promised a series of laserdisc updates, starting with *Cops* in New York.

Thompson's Venturer S2

British-based Thompson Training & Simulation has a new coin-operated, two-seat enclosed simulator on a hydraulic motion base. It's called *Venturer S2*, and it uses laserdiscs to provide passive (but thrilling) "experiences" rather than interactive games. Live-action footage is featured on some experience, computer generated graphics on others.

The beautifully realized CG stuff is definitely the most fun, playing tricks with speed and perspective to hurtle you through wild "futuristic roller-coaster rides" on other planets. The initial menu of five rides also includes tamer live-action footage shot from airplanes, cars, motorcycles, and ice-skimming bobsleds. The company plans to add rock 'n' roll and sporting experiences to its library.

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DWANGO — a new online gaming WAN

If you think that DWANGO (Dial-up Wide Area Network Gaming Operation) sounds like something from deep in the heart of Texas, you're absolutely right.

With a main office in Houston, an office in Dallas, but with a president and CEO who insists on living in New York City, DWANGO seeks to be something unique to the growing field of multiplayer gaming — an industry standard.

In an earlier column, I talked about LANs, or Local Area Networks — computers wired together in a home or office, able to share files and programs, and more importantly, able to run multiplayer games like *Doom*. Wide Area Networks, or WANs, are also used by businesses; offices in different cities are hooked up over telecommunications lines (usually dedicated, high speed lines like ISDN or ATM) so that one office's LAN can share information with another office's LAN. DWANGO is a new wide area network for gamers.

DWANGO's lobby is a free area (no charge for connect time), so players can meet, chat, and form teams to enter the various games. It plans to place the lobby as an open area on the Internet so that DWANGO subscribers can peer out of their gaming neighborhood into the vastness of cyberspace, and even entertain Net surfers who want to come by and talk shop. You can even visit DWANGO's web page now and download the DWANGO software for free at <http://www/nti/net.dwango/welcome.html> and give DWANGO a look-see for yourself. Of course, the game service itself will not be accessible through the Internet, and will not be free. But as DWANGO prepares to install servers around the world (several are already planned for Tokyo) and, as DWANGO connects all the servers to each other, you will have a global community of game freaks ready to level BFG-9000s at each other in cyberspace, where hopefully, everyone can hear you

scream. DWANGO already supports *Doom*, *Doom II*, *Heretic*, and *Terminal Velocity*. Mac users (more on them in a later column) need not fret, as DWANGO plans to support the Mac version of *Doom*, too. And, realizing that content is king, DWANGO is in the middle of trying to secure titles like jet combat flight sim *TFX-2000*; a driving game to take the place of *NASCAR*; and even *MechWarrior 2: The Clans*.

DWANGO's goals are simple: have a network dedicated to multiplayer gameplay that is easy to use — dial in, and be ready to go, and to have a network that has consistent speed of play, with realtime action and low latency (very short wait for data to be processed and sent back, which is distinctly different to data transfer rate). According to the company's President and CEO Bob Huntley, the 19.2 k bps access is optimal for gaming. At 28.8 k, he says, delays were caused because, if the line conditions changed, the modem would seek to renegotiate a link and data transfer rate. That delay was unacceptable in high-speed realtime action games, said Huntley.

DWANGO is taking a different approach to online gaming. Attracted by the bright lights of the big cities (and the bigger audiences), DWANGO will have 23 servers in major cities across the US, including three servers in the Bay Area, New York, Phoenix, Philly, and even Shreveport, LA. Lucky residents there can dial a local number and be connected to a virtual arena. And while *NASCAR Racing* was originally slated for support, Papyrus has since begun extensive testing of its own online gaming service.

What makes DWANGO

unique? Well, unlike Genie, for example, it isn't seeking out multiplayer game developers necessarily; Kesmai and Simutronics,

Bernard Yee has contributed to *USA Today* and writes regularly for *PC Gamer*, *PC Magazine*, and has authored several books on gaming

by Bernard Yee

known only for their multiplayer game audience, has a smaller market share than Id Software. And DWANGO isn't tied to any one developer — it's seeking to work with as many computer game companies to support DWANGO compatibility as an add-on element to its network and modem-ready games as possible.

The final unique point about DWANGO is its speed-optimized server code and gameplay. Every aspect of the service has been designed to support fast, realtime gameplay, according to Huntley. Services like AOL, CompuServe, Genie, and even ImagiNation Network have too high a latency time to support the fast-action games that DWANGO wants for its audience. "We want to work with as many content developers as possible," adds the CEO. "The kind of games we run, you can't run on Genie."

DWANGO isn't a sure bet, by any means. In a strange way, DWANGO is like 3D0 — dependent on others for software, which leaves it room to maneuver without being committed, but also requires the service to be constantly pursuing the top game developers for support. But investing money in an online gaming service is worth it, if you can play your favorite games with other gunslingers from around your city, time zone, and planet. So if you want to find out more about DWANGO's latest supported games, check out its web page or call this number: 1 (713) 467-0405.

Cyberspace gadget of the month: a game: Activision's *MechWarrior 2: The Clans* comes with a network and modem-ready demo, with full network support planned for the fall.

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Generator

by Mark James Ramshaw

Extracting the latest news, views, and rumors from the industry with a very sharp scalpel and some surgical gloves



It must have seemed like a great idea — to incorporate full-motion video into computer games. What better way to add Hollywood production values to the videogame world than to bring in real Hollywood actors? And yet there's never been one product which has managed to combine video clips with gameplay satisfactorily. Some offer too little interaction, others simply have a bunch of actors thrown into cut-scenes in what seems like an afterthought, or a waste of money at the very least. There's a problem with image quality, but that's not really what has caused the backlash. People are prepared to put up with a blocky chunk of animation if at least vaguely they can recognize the mass of pixels as Johnny Depp or someone else. No, the real problem lies with interaction. Show a pre-filmed clip of some actor strutting his stuff, and there's not a lot of opportunity for the player to get involved. Make that player watch the same scene every time the game is played, and an eternal loathing of FMV will grow.

"Basically, it's this production over context thing which has been going on over the last 18 months," says Eric Matthews of game coders the Bitmap Brothers. *"Rebel Assault* was shitty as a game, but it looked nice so people were prepared to put up with it. And *7th Guest* was garbage, too. But I think this Christmas will be the last time we see that kind of game appearing."

Criterion is the developer of *Renderware* — a package providing realtime 3D routines for PC game programmers. Head of Criterion's game development is Nik Wild, who sees the impending death of FMV as a result of increased PC power. "Flashy sequences are all very well, but the market has wised up to shallowness of pre-rendered and pre-recorded imagery. It still has a place in games, for intros and cut scenes, but the industry is realizing that gameplay is what counts, and it's what sells. Ready-to-use 3D packages like *Renderware* make it possible to concentrate on the quality of gameplay."

Games which use pre-stored imagery are always going to become victims of linearity. It's possible to offer several pathways, but the player always ends up traveling down some pre-acted and pre-stored scenes. And as David Jones, creator of *Lemmings* and president of DMA Design, states, "Linear games stink!" So what's the alternative if FMV sequences are to be thrown out of the window, and pre-rendered 3D scenes spell trouble for gameplay? "What people will start to do is stream off 3D geometry from CD. They could store a world on CD which can be drawn in realtime," reckons David. "We're doing some work in that area. It's a matter of getting the PC, 3D, and the CD mixing, rather than being pre-rendered."

It could well be time to wave goodbye to FMV then. After all, as Eric Matthews puts it: "I really like movies. But if it's a movie I want to see, then I'll go to the theater."

For a more in-depth look at FMV issues and the genre's pioneering figure, please see the interview with Tom Zito, president of Digital Pictures, on page 6.

Mark James Ramshaw works free-lance as a video game and music writer, and software designer, producer, and evaluator. He can be e-mailed at mark@hoops.demon.co.uk

Datebook

September

AMOA—EXPO 95 (The Amusement & Music Operators Association), is September 21 to 23 in New Orleans, Louisiana at the New Orleans Convention Center. This expo is primarily for owners, operators, managers, distributors, suppliers, and manufacturers of pinball games, videogames, CD jukeboxes, pool tables, and is open to the public. In addition to exhibition, education seminars will address subjects such as topical management, technical, and marketing issues. For more information, call (312) 245-1021.

October

The **PC EXPO**, from October 3 to 5 will be held in Chicago, Illinois at McCormick Place East. This trade show focuses on the computer trade and the needs of senior-level computer professionals from the Midwest. There will be computer hardware and software exhibits (games) on display. Portable computers, graphical user interface applications, networking, client/server and multimedia technologies will also be exhibited. For more information call: (800) 829-3976.

Home & Family Computing Supershow, will show on October 6 to 8 at Boston's Bayside Exposition Center and on October 20 to 22 at Atlanta's Cobb Galleria Center. Open to the public, this show is designed to provide an easy way for families to learn about computer and other high-tech products that emphasize education and entertainment. For more information call (713) 974-5252.

Autodesk University, showing from October 29 to November 2, San Francisco at the Moscone Convention Center. Open to public, this conference provides classes that focus on multimedia topics, a broad range of CAD tools, and techniques enabled by AutoCAD and its related applications. Special events include the first "Planet Studio" Multimedia Awards and Electronic Festival. Call: (415) 691-1488.

Fall Internet World on October 30 to Nov 2 at Boston, MA. This show is set up for individuals seeking to take full advantage of the global commercial info infrastructure. Exhibitors include software developers, game developers, network admins, information designers, webmasters, and many others. For information call 1 (800) 632-5537.

November

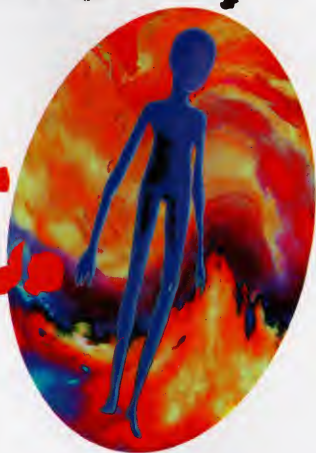
Fall VR World on November 28 to December 1 in Boston, MA. This show is the largest exhibition devoted exclusively to VR products and services. More than 80 leading VR software, hardware, and marketing companies will be available to demonstrate their products aimed at the arcade, entertainment center, amusement parks, home, architectural, medical and design industry. For more information call (203) 226-6967.

December

Home & Family Computing Supershow, on December 8 to 10 at the Dallas Convention Center and December 15 to 17 at the Moscone Center in SF, CA. Open to the public, this show provides an easy way for families to learn about high-tech computer products emphasizing education and entertainment. Call: (713) 974-5252.

SHOW ORGANIZERS: If your show isn't listed here, it's because you haven't told us about it. Call (415) 696-1688, or FAX information to (415) 696-1678, or send details to DATEBOOK, NEXT Generation, 1350 Old Bayshore Highway, Suite 210, Burlingame, CA 94010.

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Do video games screw you up?

Videogames are corrupting the youth of America! Or so read the headlines in 1993 when the US Senate began hearings on violence in videogames. Before long, band-wagoning politicians across the country took up the cry — videogames enslaved children with addicting images of sex and violence, causing antisocial behavior. More sinister were reports that certain videogames could trigger life-threatening epileptic seizures, as well as permanent injuries from RSI (Repetitive Stress Injuries).

Of course, none of this was anything new. Most of the points raised by the Senators had been brought up during the first gaming craze of the early '80s, although, with today's perspective, games like *Space Invaders* look more quaint than threatening. And you don't have to stop there. It seems like once anything is popular enough with "the kids" — Dungeons and Dragons, comic books, rock 'n' roll music, TV, anything — someone, somewhere, will come up with a reason to hold hearings, make threats, (possibly) implement a rating system, and (hopefully) jump up a few points in the polls.

But beyond the paranoid hype, beyond the fears of concerned parents, and nearer to the core of the issue are difficult, and often unanswered, questions. "Could there be some truth to the charges laid at the feet of videogames? What physical and mental repercussions do playing videogames have?" A good RPG (role-playing game) can easily draw one in for hours of uninterrupted, solo gameplay. Playing a fighting game may be a little more social, but what about all that rapid-button pushing? Who's hand hasn't hurt at least once after an intense gaming session? And yes, there is a lot of violence in videogames — but that can't really make you a more violent person in real life, can it?

With an eye toward clearing up this matter for good, **NEXT Generation** decided to examine comprehensively the various charges against videogames, both on the physical and psychological side. What's fact and what's hype? Read on.



Videogames can, in some cases, trigger epileptic seizures in those predisposed to them, particularly in those who are extremely sensitive to light

Epilepsy

Claims that videogames can trigger epileptic fits first surfaced in the early 1980s. (The first incident reported in medical literature dates back to 1981.) The English tabloid newspaper *The Sun* reported in early 1993 that a boy choked to death on his own vomit after an attack precipitated by playing a Nintendo game. A flurry of similar incidents, none as serious, were quickly picked up by the international media. Before long both Sega and Nintendo games had epilepsy warnings in game manuals, although some of the symptoms they list (dizziness, loss of awareness) seem just as indicative of a good gaming experience as they do of an oncoming seizure. Today, epilepsy warnings can be found in the manuals of games for all available systems.

Since the dawn of videogaming, there have been 50 cases of videogame-related seizures (VGRS) reported in medical literature, though the actual number of incidents is probably substantially higher. A comprehensive study of the problem, published in 1994 in the journal *Pediatrics*, found that playing videogames did not cause seizures in people not already predisposed to an epileptic condition. About half of the affected individuals had abnormal Electro Encephalo Graph (EEG) readings when lights were flashed in their eyes (about 5% of the general epileptic population also display abnormal EEGs when exposed to flashing lights).

Later in 1994, a study published in *The Lancet* found similar results. It also noted that the flicker pattern of a TV most likely to cause seizures became more noticeable as one approached the screen. That is, if you have seizures because of a sensitivity to light, sitting near the TV is a very bad idea. Putting so many sprites on the screen that some begin to flicker can also increase the likelihood of a VGRS in those who are susceptible to them. The study also noted that seizures in people with extreme photosensitivity could also be triggered by exposure to regular TV images and striped patterns like venetian blinds and escalators.

It seems clear that videogames can, in some cases, trigger epileptic seizures in those predisposed to them, particularly in those who are extremely sensitive to light. However, of the millions of children and adults who have played videogames, only an extremely small percentage (.05%) will ever experience any problems of this nature. And only a few who experience problems will have the most adverse reaction — a full “grand mal” seizure. Staying well back from the screen (about 10 feet) can decrease the chances of a problem, and in people with an already noted condition, purchasing a special 100 Hz TV, or wearing sunglasses while playing, can further decrease the risk of a problem.

EPILEPSY WARNING

READ BEFORE USING YOUR VIDEO GAME SYSTEM

A very small percentage of individuals may experience epileptic seizures when exposed to certain light patterns or flashing lights. Exposure to certain patterns of light (especially one in which patterns or shapes playing video games may induce an epileptic seizure in these individuals. Certain conditions may induce uncontrolled epileptic symptoms, even in persons who have no history of prior seizures or epilepsy. If you, or anyone in your family, has an epileptic condition, consult your physician prior to playing. If you experience any of the following symptoms while playing a video game: dizziness, altered vision, eye or muscle twitches, loss of awareness, disorientation, any involuntary movements, or convulsions, IMMEDIATELY discontinue use and consult your physician before resuming play.

All videogames come with warnings about the dangers of a Video Game Related Seizure (VGRS), but are only epileptic sufferers at risk?



Repetitive Strain Injuries

Repetitive Strain Injuries, or RSI, are a condition resulting from (as the name implies) the cumulative effect of repeated strain on one group of muscles and ligaments. The RSI that gamers would most have to worry about is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS). In CTS, overuse of the muscles and ligaments in the hand and wrist cause them to thicken. This decreases the size of a ridged passageway created by the carpal (wrist) bones and the transverse carpal ligaments, through which your median nerve travels. The median nerve controls sensory abilities to the thumb, the thumb side of the palm, and the index and middle fingers. As the size of the Carpal Tunnel is decreased, pressure begins to be placed on the median nerve, which causes intense pain and can lead to partial paralysis and permanent weakness of the hand.

Almost any activity that puts strain on or uses the wrist, from racquetball to bowling, sewing, driving, painting, use of tools, typing, and of course, playing videogames, can eventually build up the muscles and ligaments in the wrist enough to cause CTS. The big question is, "How much activity is needed before a problem arises, and can videogames trigger CTS?"

The answers are not clear. The most frequent sufferers of CTS are people who put in long hours typing at a computer keyboard, every day, for months at a time. Data presented by Dr. Thomas Armstrong, from the University of Michigan, at a 1991 seminar entitled "RSI... Newspapers at Risk," suggests that RSIs have been around since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. He cited examples from a 1717 study by Bernardo Ramazzini, an Italian physician, who observed a disease in writers characterized by pain and weakness in the hand and caused by "the perpetual motion of the hand in the same manner."

The main factors of a CTS flare-up seem to be determined by gender and repetition of the activity. Women,

particularly pregnant women, and those from ages 30 to 60, have a higher risk than men, because hormonal changes can exacerbate a slight condition. CTS, like other RSIs, depends on frequent, intense activity. Playing a single game of racquetball (or *Super Street Fighter II*) isn't going to cripple you. But if you play videogames without a break, eight hours a day for seven months, you might start to have a problem. At the same time, doing anything with your hands for long periods of time can lead to CTS problems. Even professional sign language interpreters have huge problems with CTS.

Can videogames cause CTS? Although no scientific studies have been done that specifically relate to videogames and RSI, there's no reason to think that videogames, which do involve use of the hands after all, are somehow special and can't cause RSI. So then, is there an actual solution? In fact, preventing videogame-induced RSI is as simple as taking frequent breaks from playing and not overdoing it.

If you begin to feel any numbness or weakness in your hands, tingling, joint pain, a weakening grip or impaired finger movement, see a doctor. RSIs are a risk (albeit a small one, if you play games less than 40 hours a week or so) and if you don't want to end up wearing splints 24 hours a day, getting steroids injected into your wrists, or undergoing risky surgery (not to mention enduring massive amounts of pain every time you try to use your fingers or hands), you'd do well to make sure you follow a few simple steps you need to take to avoid them. 1) Take breaks, about five to 10 minutes every hour; 2) play videogames in moderation, and if it's your kids playing, adults should supervise them; 3) and make sure to pay attention to your body signals, that is, if you feel pain, stop playing.



And another thing, Doc...

There are a litany of other complaints attributed to videogames, for which there is little scientific data, but a wealth of anecdotal evidence. Here's a rundown.

Foremost are complaints of eye-strain from playing both arcade and home videogames. Informal testing at the **NEXT Generation** office revealed that blink rates per minute dropped dramatically when playing games (and to a lesser extent when using a computer). In one extreme case, blink rates dropped from 30 per minute when doing something manual, like packing a box, to two per minute while playing a 32-bit racing game. Dry eyes are particularly a problem for contact lens wearers. Informal surveys we conducted at arcades indicate the problem is present there as well.

As long as videogames remain exciting, there doesn't seem to be much hope for a cure to this potentially painful problem. Thanks to evolution, the human eye tends not to blink when viewing motion — a smart strategy for survival on the savanna, or in *Super Bomberman II*. Our solution: cut scenes and pre-rendered intros are for blinking (we knew there had to be a reason for them someplace). Be aware, and blink whenever the action ceases (not a problem for CD-i owners). But in the end, your eyes hurting is a very polite way of your body telling you to take a break (be glad the signal isn't you twitching on the living room floor).

A more serious vision problem is presented by Nintendo's new Virtual Boy. The artificial stereo (3D) display used by the unit can — according to the packaging — cause permanent damage to the vision of young children, whose eyesight is not fully developed. This is a serious concern, which Nintendo has addressed clearly on the packaging of the product — let's just hope people heed the warning and don't dismiss it as a meaningless disclaimer.

Another dilemma many people confront while playing videogames is motion sickness. Just as some people get sick on roller-coasters or the Tilt-A-Whirl, some people can't handle the motion of *Doom* or *Descent*. When the eyes perceive motion, but the inner ear doesn't, problems occur. This is especially prevalent in the field of virtual reality (**NG 9**). When rotating or lifting your head changes your

view, you feel it, but when you move forward, you don't. The result: nausea. More than unperceived motion, the short lag between head or hand movements and reaction in VR can be, well, sickening, as can be improperly calibrated HMDs that leave you feeling like you are always tilting 10° forward or backward. The weight of the helmet on top of the head can cause problems, too. And while researchers are hard at work defusing as many of the somewhat solvable problems of VR, if you get sick when you play *Doom*, there's really only one solution: stop. Like many of the problems associated with videogaming, this is something of a nonissue. Few people tried to ban IMAX movies because they make some people ill.

Though this is not strictly related to RSIs, which are a more serious problem, incurring a sore thumb is often the consequence from a marathon playing session with a joystick. We have one gamer in the office who got blisters from *Sonic I*. This is painful, but, barring gangrene, not fatal. Solutions: calm down — the rocker switches will connect with a little push as well as a big one. Or, you could just play through the pain and go for the thumb callous, which is what many professionals — from guitar players to carpenters — initially develop.

A stiff neck or sore back muscles caused from sitting in one position while playing are also common, though minor. Again, the solution is simple. When you're taking the break to rest your eyes (see above), stretch, take a walk, and relax.

Overall, it's clear that while there are some serious physical problems that can be associated with videogames, the vast majority of complaints bear a striking similarity to those that affect people driving for long distances. Or sitting working at computer workstations for long periods of time. Or doing any sedentary activity for long periods of time.

Basically, most of the complaints about the physical problems associated with videogames can be overcome with a modicum of common sense.

But can we say the same about the possible psychological effects?

Does an endless litany of fatalities, death moves, and other various and sundry forms of killing desensitize players to violence? Does it make them care as little about the death of a child in Bosnia as they do about the death of Sub Zero?



Do Violent Games Make Players Violent?

The possible link between violent games and aggressive behavior has been at the center of the media's concern with the possible dangers of videogames, climaxing with senate hearings and the implementation of a "voluntary" ratings system by the industry. The seemingly knee-jerk move of implementing a ratings system without any real debate served to get the senate off the back of the industry without too much trouble. However, though the issue isn't in congress any longer, the rating system looked to many in the gaming business like an admission that there was something to the fear-mongers' claims about the dangers of videogames, and that the senate was right to get involved.

In actual fact, there is no proof that games cause any psychological harm at all.

There is no doubt that the majority of videogames have themes that involve violence or killing at some point. A study by Dr. Jeanne Funk, published in the journal *Clinical Pediatrics*, found that among younger players (7th and 8th grade students), games involving human or fantasy violence accounted for 49% of preferred games, with sports games (which often have violent content) accounting for another 29%. Educational games accounted for a mere 2%.

So violent games are popular. Is that surprising or different? Fortunately or unfortunately, violent movies and TV shows are popular, too. Any type of news, whether written or on TV, shows a tremendous amount of violence, whether it's in the US, or in just about any other country. The question is, does playing violent games foster aggressive solutions to problems? Or, perhaps worse, does constant exposure to violence in videogames desensitize players to violence in all aspects of their lives?

Despite some evidence that violent content on TV increases aggression in the interpersonal relationships of children, two studies conducted by Dr. Steven Silvern at Auburn University discount the theory that violent videogames result in violent patterns of behavior. At the time one

study was published, Silvern was quoted in *US News & World Report* as saying "After playing [videogames], children don't necessarily feel angry; they feel aroused."

To nonplayers, it may look as though children are sitting quietly in front of the set, playing a (possibly violent) game one minute, and bouncing off the walls the next. Has the violent content of the game turned little Sarah into a killing machine? Hardly. The key element here is adrenaline. When playing a (good) game, a player's concentration is totally devoted to the action on screen. After beating a boss, or a friend in head-to-head play, there is an incredible amount of adrenaline built up, not unlike when you get out of an exciting movie. An increase in physical activity immediately after playing is natural and to be expected.

Most kids are naturally energetic as well. Many have vivid imaginations, and often act out. Parents who are worried about violent play would do well to remember how they played growing up, or to ask their parents how they acted. The fact that Johnny was talking excitedly about how many times he "killed" Eddy at *Mortal Kombat* isn't much different than kids who take turns "killing" each other when playing cops and robbers or cowboys and Indians. It's tough to point solely to videogames when children's play (video or otherwise) often involves make-believe violence. For example, the story of the child, who, having lost a toy gun to a parental authority,

instantly picks up a stick and announces "this is my new gun" is cliché.

What is perhaps more concerning than whether kids will be rambunctious after playing a game is whether an endless litany of fatalities, death moves, and other various and sundry forms

of killing will desensitize players to violence, making them about as concerned about the death of a child in Bosnia as they do about one of the many deaths of Sub Zero's they might see in a day. Certainly

there's no question that a violent movie like *Natural Born Killers* may be shocking and disgusting to see the first time, but repeated viewings will certainly take away any shock at seeing the violence. It gets boring to see the same kills again and again — which is why the kids are playing *Mortal Kombat III* and not *Street Fighter II*. But the real question is whether or not a desensitization to fictional violence carries over into the real world.

The answer is not simple, and it hinges on several factors. The desensitization of people is well documented: a war veteran or an ER nurse will be less shocked by the sight of a bloody car wreck than an "ordinary" person, for example. But do humans log away "real" and "fictional" based experiences separately? It's not clear. Certainly, all children learn real-world skills by playing and from fictional stories.

But do videogames teach them the wrong lessons? Maybe they simply play an unavoidable part in a child's development. All children have a propensity to "explore" violence, and if their desire to experience violence isn't satisfied

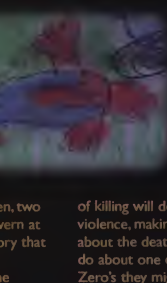
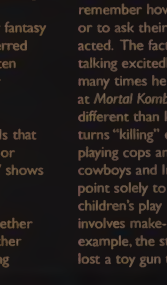
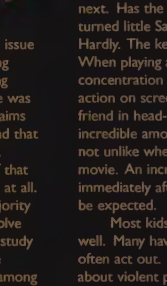
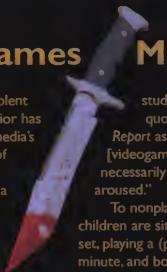
in front of a videogame, then it may manifest itself in another, less safe, environment.

There is also the point that by virtue of videogaming's interactivity, playing violent games actually teaches "cause and effect" —

a way that noninteractive TV or movies can never do. A regular player of *Mortal Kombat* may understand the implications of violence more than a nonplayer. The question arises, however, as to whether he or she will have learned that violence is a viable solution to everyday, real-world problems. Let's hope not.

The graphic realism of a game may also affect the game's psychological effect. The fact is, in terms of realism, videogames still pale in comparison to actual video images of violence that are seen regularly on TV.

If there's a finger to be pointed when it comes to desensitization to violence, we should look to movies and TV, not videogames. At least, not until we see fully interactive (not FMV) games like "Virtua Torture," that are indistinguishable from TV quality images. Until then, games should be merely viewed as secondary concerns.



Videogame Addiction

Are videogames addictive? Of course — depending on what you mean by the term “addictive.”

There are few, if any, gamers who have not rushed home from work or school to play their latest game — maybe even neglecting responsibilities in the process. Who hasn't heard someone say they need a “fix” of their current favorite game? The popular literature is littered with reports of people who found that games were “taking over their lives,” until they had to quit, “cold turkey.” People talk about some games (especially puzzlers, like *Tetris*) as if they were drugs. Are they addictive? Are they dangerous? Is there really a good case for banning or heavily regulating games like any other drug?

Hardly. Unless you also want to ban soap operas, board games, paper and dice role-playing games, good books, and almost every other leisure activity known to man. Strictly speaking, addiction is defined as the compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance (as heroin, nicotine, or alcohol) characterized by tolerance and well-defined psychological symptoms upon withdrawal (Merriam Webster's, tenth Edition). So while the lure of entertainment itself, is at its heart, much the same as that of many

dangerous drugs — they provide a temporary escape from the problems of the real world — they are not strictly addictive. They can, however, be habit-forming and trigger compulsive behavior. And while the physiology of addiction to drugs like heroin or cocaine have been well documented and are clear, little is easily explained in cases of “addiction” to TV, gambling, videogames, or any other entertainment activity.

The main difference between traditional forms of entertainment and videogames is control. As opposed to books or movies, which merely enable you to live vicariously in another world through someone else's eyes, videogames

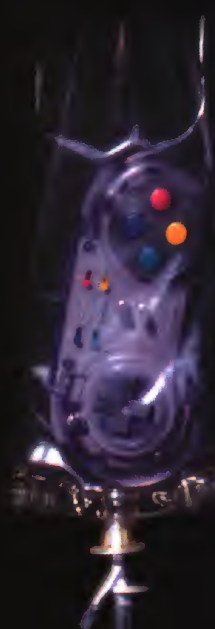
(good ones, anyway) enable you to explore on your own terms, and eventually enable you to become the master of an entire virtual universe (if using the term virtual universe to refer to the platform worlds of *Sonic* isn't too pretentious).

In addition to providing the escapism of books, movies, and TV, videogames also provide the challenge of traditional games, appealing to humans' competitive nature, and provide a sense of accomplishment when finished. “People have very little control in their lives today — there is less freedom than in previous generations, and videogames provide the perfect means for a person to gain control of their life,” says Dr. Margaret A. Shotton, author of *Computer Addiction? A Study of Computer Dependency*. This lack of control certainly explains why people are attracted to videogames — an escape to a controllable world — is particularly strong. This isn't to say that videogames are necessarily a better form of entertainment than movies or books — few games (with the exception of some of the more tedious RPGs) can match the depth of a good book, and if a game's cut scenes or prose have ever matched the quality of the best movies or books, **NEXT Generation** is unaware of it.

Shotton concludes that the psychological process behind male teenagers becoming “addicted” to videogames is closely related to the prevalence of anorexia among teenage women. In both cases, the total power a person may hold over one particular element of his or her life (playing a videogame, or eating) is heinously abused.

The one-two punch of easy escapism combined with the challenge of a game (especially multiplayer games — it's much more fun to beat a friend than a computer) is a powerful attractor. If it wasn't, you wouldn't be reading this magazine.

So, for a variety of reasons, games are compelling, they can draw you in and keep you interested for hours at a stretch. But a strict textbook definition of addiction requires that the addict is *harm*ed by his or her addiction. Can videogames go from being a relaxing pastime to a dangerous compulsion that takes over one's life, causing one to neglect family relationships, and other responsibilities? Considering we live in a world where people stalk Bob Saget, the answer is, not surprisingly, yes.



"It's not so much the videogames, it's a flaw within the individual that's brought out by the availability of the games," says Edward Looney, Executive Director of the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey, and an expert on compulsive behavior. His group, set up to help compulsive gamblers, has received an increasing number of calls from people in recent years who are having problems with addictions to videogames, mostly arcade games. People addicted to videogames, he says "are doing what all addicted people do, which is avoiding their real problems."

So what's the solution? Should we regulate games? Ban them? Looney doesn't think so. "Most people can do these things in a normal and healthy way," he says. In fact, Looney has observed that talking away the addictive activity or product often just causes those suffering from addiction to switch to a "spare tire" or backup addiction. Take away the videogames, he says, and the person may switch to a dangerous food addiction or something similar. The key, according to Looney, is to fix the underlying problem — not to treat the symptoms.

One group of people who can have trouble with playing for too long, without necessarily being compulsively addicted, is children. "Many kids can't define limits," says Dr. Miriam Saltmarch, a professor in the Department of Food and Nutrition at San Jose State University, in San Jose, CA. "Like the studies of rats that keep pushing a button that triggers the pleasure center in their brain until they die, lots of kids will play these games until you stop them."

And what should a parent's reaction be to such a situation? "If a person can't stop themselves, they need to have limits set for them by a parent," argues Saltmarch. "There are a lot of kids who can quit. And then there are the kids who push the envelope, who crave stimulation for their brains. Kids with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), once called hyperactivity, tend to love videogames." Saltmarch limits her own child, who has ADD, to one hour a day. "But it can be positive for a kid with ADD to play for a long time, if they're good at it. It doesn't frustrate them and it builds self-esteem."

So, it would seem that videogame "addiction" is a symptom of a deeper problem, and not necessarily a problem in itself. But, then that's what the NRA would say about assault weapons. All that is clear is that more research is necessary.

Do Videogames Make You Antisocial?

David Sheff observes in his book *Videogames, A Guide For Savvy Parents* that whereas "Generations of children had been imbued with Mickey [Mouse]'s message: *We play fair and we work hard and we're in harmony...*" and so on, [the game] *Mario* imparted other values: *Kill or be killed. Time is running out [and — perhaps most importantly] You are on your own.*"

It's an interesting point. Certainly, of all the charges videogames stand accused of, this one would, at first glance, seem to have the most validity. Videogame playing can be a very solitary activity. As we noted above, one of the attractions of videogames is their ability to let us escape the real world. Does this cause players to withdraw from their peers? Are videogames fundamentally antisocial?

Most people who have actually played games will tell you that not only is this not the case in the majority of situations, but, in fact, the exact opposite is true — videogames are both an extremely social activity and a great social equalizer. "As a trend, I've found that introverted people have increased their social circles through playing videogames, but I have never found that extroverted people become more withdrawn or isolated," says Dr. Shotton. When dealing with this question, it is very important that we take into account what genre of games we are talking about.

Fighting games are probably the most social of all game types. They enable people to compete in a friendly challenge of skill, regardless of physical ability; in that sense, they are a great social equalizer, permitting anyone to participate. Informal surveys conducted at arcades found that the majority of players who played against the machine said it was "boring," and relished being able to play against other people, sometimes to the point of giving strangers quarters when they ran out, so that they could keep playing.

Playing an RPG or adventure game, which may seem like a textbook definition

of a solitary activity, can also become a social activity if two or more people decide to play together. Even though only one person is manipulating the joystick, both people can play the game, working together to solve puzzles. Usually the "nonplayer" takes on the key role of mapper. Since RPGs and adventure games are less dependent on fast reaction times, all the people playing can consult on what the next move should be. This kind of game enables players to team up, and it can create camaraderie.

In fact, we make the contention that it isn't RPGs that can be the most solitary games, but rather shooters and platform games, which, *Tails* aside, are fundamentally

one-player games. Still, there are many leisure activities (like books) that are very solitary. That isn't the problem — everyone wants to spend time alone now and then, and the escape potential of videogames is well known, and in fact is one of their main attractions. The real

question is, "Does playing solitary games make you withdraw from social interaction with other humans?" And the answer seems to be a resounding no. Dr. Miriam Saltmarch has found that with many children, "it gives a lot of these kids something to have in common with other kids. It can be an equalizer and a basis for making social connections that they otherwise couldn't make."

Conclusion

So let's wrap it up. Are videogames harmful? The risks from epileptic seizures are real, but they affect only an extremely small portion of the population. Certain addictive personalities can make a compulsion out of anything, and videogames are no exception, but for the vast majority of people, adults and children, the answer is clear: Videogames are nothing more than what they appear to be — a great way to relax, and a lot of fun to play.

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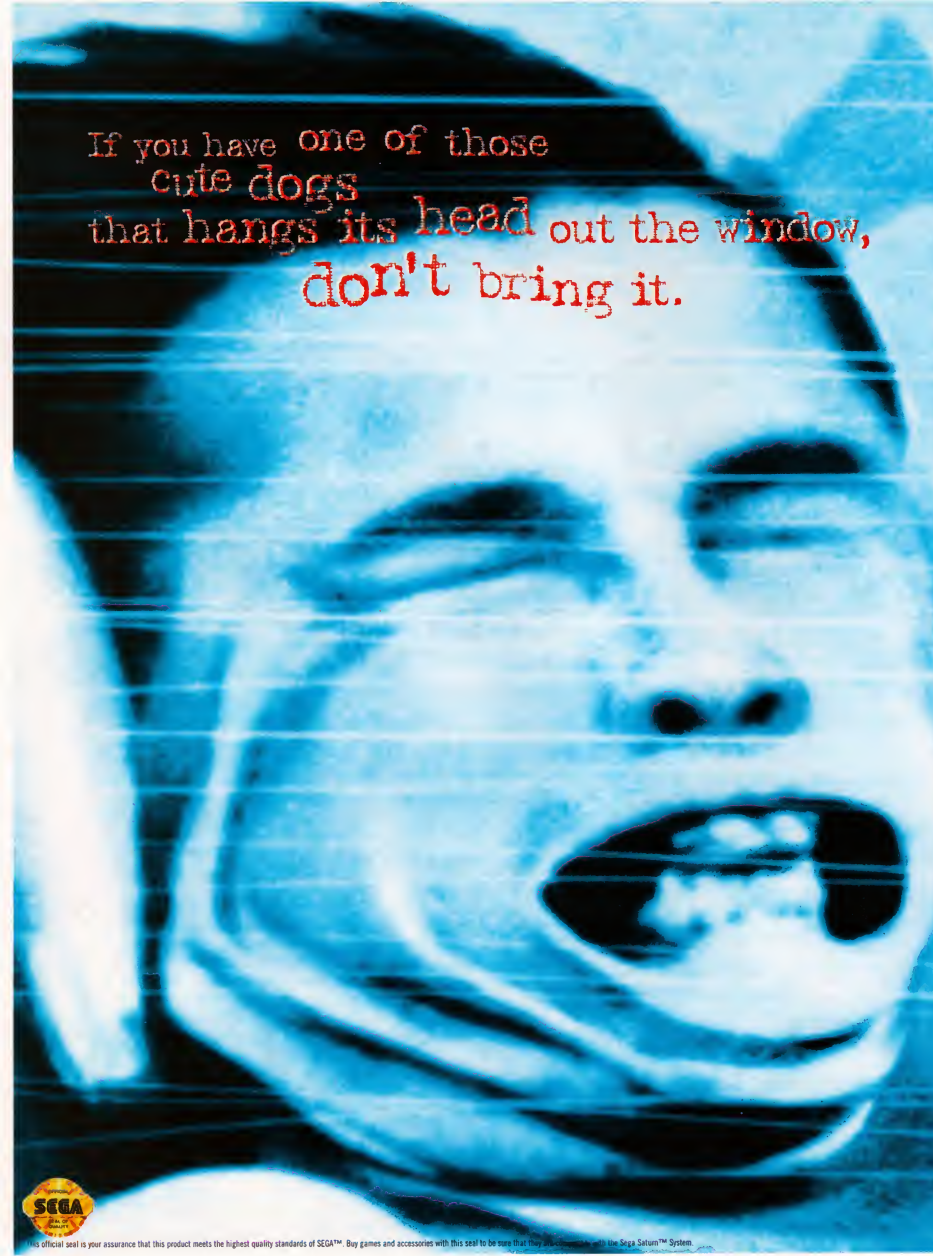
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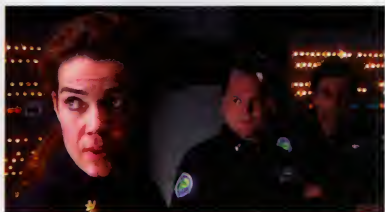
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Motion capture

With gamers demanding ever-greater levels of realism, more and more developers are turning to motion capture — the science of translating real-world movement into computer animation. **NEXT Generation** examines the latest technology in this fast-moving and increasingly important field



As the graphics capabilities of domestic hardware have improved, the need for traditional 3D animation techniques has increased. Character animation has always been one of the biggest obstacles in the generation of convincing graphics; despite huge increases in processing power, more advanced rendering techniques, and all the other weapons in the computer animator's armory, natural movement has remained an elusive goal.

Dean LeCoe, of American motion-capture systems manufacturer Motion Analysis, puts his finger on the problem: "You could draw an interesting environment, say a city street, and give it an atmosphere. You could put the lights in, you could put in the shading, you could make something very realistic. But when you tried to walk a person through that you lost any sense of realism because, probably deep in our primitive brain, we can watch a person walk from a great distance and tell instinctively whether they're young or old, healthy or unhealthy."

This is because, of all the visual information received by the brain, movement is processed first, ahead of both form and color. It's a survival instinct left over from our existence as a hunter/gatherer, and a fundamental part of our genetic make-up. This sense is also very difficult to fool.

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Despite fairly impressive advances in the 1980s — such as the inclusion of hierarchical skeletal systems in animation software and the introduction of inverse kinematics (in which joints are set up as control points which the animator uses to determine movement) — 3D computer animation of human motion has never quite managed to be fully convincing. This is why an increasing number of leading-edge game companies are now looking toward motion capture, where a performer's movement is translated into raw data and then ported into an animation package. The technology enables developers to create computer character animation that is more fluid and more realistic than anything that can be achieved with any other system.

Realism is the key. "You can hold the illusion, the suspension of disbelief, longer if you can get the character to move realistically," comments Carl Swanick of Lore Design, whose *Highlander* (a title soon to appear for Atari's Jaguar system, NG 7) is one of a multitude of new games which use motion capture techniques to impart greater realism to animation.

These games include current sensations such as *Tekken*, as well as forthcoming titles like Acclaim's *Alien Trilogy*, Gremlin's *Actua Soccer*, and Psygnosis' *Powersport Soccer*. But the number of games employing the



A typical optical set-up. First, highly reflective balls are attached to set points on the subject. Strobe lights then play over the capture area and sensors record the movement of the balls

venturing into it in the past six months," says Pete Meddings of Oxford Metrics (which has

make this work in a reasonable timeframe."

Medding agrees. "You can capture 30 or 40 moves in a day. I don't know how long it takes people to animate or keyframe things to the same quality, but my feeling is that it must take longer than a day."

Swanick is more cautious, pointing out that it's not an instantaneous solution and coupling the data set to the desired animation is still time consuming, but he still concludes that it's a time saver: "It's swings and roundabouts. A good computer animator will probably do one or two frames a day, while we can probably get away with 10, so it is faster in a way. The way you've got to mold them all together makes them more complex, so you can lose your advantage. But you'll still produce more with motion capture."

The history of motion capture can be traced as far back as the late 1800s, to experiments performed by photographic pioneer Eadweard Muybridge and others involving banks of cameras operated by tripwires. Such experiments were performed on behalf of medical science or the military (and, the most famous example, for a bet to see whether all four of a horse's legs leave the ground at full gallop). But it wasn't until Max Fleischer patented the rotochrome in 1917 that the benefits of motion capture were really felt.

Traditional 2D cel rotoscoping simply depended on an animator tracing over individual frames of film. The increased

"There's an almost overwhelming interest in motion capture. There aren't that many people using it yet, but the interest is certainly there"

technology is by no means representative of the amount of attention the industry is showing to the field. "We only started

already sold one of its Vicon 370 optical systems to Probe Entertainment), "but there's an almost overwhelming interest in it. There aren't that many people using it yet, but the interest is certainly there."

"Games seem to be a big driver right now," agrees Ascension Technology's Jack Scully. "Although the people who are making the animation for movies, television, and commercials are holding their own."

Apart from the benefits to realism, another crucial factor in the increasing use of the technology is its potential for speeding up the production process. As games get more complex and the graphics more demanding, anything that facilitates the character animation phase is welcome.

"We've seen customers who are collecting more than 1,000 moves for a game," explains LeCoe. "And this is many, many characters doing a variety of different moves, some of which are unique to single characters. Motion capture is probably the only way you could



Twenty-three markers is regarded as the minimum for accurately capturing human motion

realism achieved by this process, especially in terms of human and animal motion, with the addition of the benefits of speedier production, saw the method being increasingly used by animation studios such as the Fleischer Brothers and Walt Disney Studios toward the middle of the century.

By the time the pioneering years of computer graphics were in full swing in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a lot of the methods used for character animation were still derived from 2D rotoscoping. Moreover, they were still incredibly labor intensive, involving either the projection of video images onto a computer screen to pose a character's

keyframes, or they were manually encoded points on a 3D model.

All current methods of motion capture rely on specialized markers which are placed on a performer's joints (knees, ankles, wrists, elbows, etc.). Once motion has been filmed or analyzed, a data set is produced to interpret that movement into Cartesian co-ordinates (xyz positions), which provide the spatial location of each of those markers. This information is then cleaned up — if necessary — and ported into one of the major animation packages, typically Alias, Wavefront, or SoftImage.

One of the earliest ways of capturing human motion and applying it directly to a 3D model involved prosthetic devices strapped onto the performer's body. A series of armatures were connected by both rotational encoders placed at the joints and linear encoders placed along the limb. Although this results in an exceptionally clean realtime data set, the physical problems of performing in what amounts to an exo-skeleton have severely curtailed its use.

Another method, which looks like it's nearing an evolutionary dead-end, is based on acoustics. Three receivers are arranged in a triangle around the capture space, with audio

Magnetic systems

The genealogy of magnetic motion capture is essentially military in origin, with systems such as Ascension Technology's Flock Of Birds and Polhemus' Fastrack derived from magnetic tracking sensors developed for installation in aviation head-mounted displays.

The way they work is very similar to acoustic systems, although here the receivers are placed on the joint positions of the body and measure positional and orientational data with respect to a transmitting antenna which produce a pulsed DC signal. The Flock transmitter consists of a core about

along all three of their axis. This results in 12 measured values per receiver per cycle, with a differential amplifier automatically subtracting the measured component of the Earth's magnetic field from the receiver values. Each receiver can make up to 144 measurements per second and the unit can track up to 30 of them simultaneously.

As Ascension's Jack Scully points out, it's a system with many advantages: "It puts out a field that is not blocked or occluded if there is some obstruction between its receiver and transmitter. As long as that body is not metallic we don't lose any data. The other big advantage is that the animator and director can see in realtime how a session went. They can see a wireframe on a screen and they can review it from there. The third advantage is the fact that the magnetic system is probably a quarter of the price of the optical one."

While price is a consideration, magnetic systems have drawbacks. The main one is the cabling linking every single receiver to the transmitter, which precludes fast action takes. Also, any metal in the vicinity can cause ferrous interference, producing unwanted spikes in the data. The capture area is also quite small, the Flock can only capture in a 16-foot hemisphere.

This problem can be surmounted using zoning. "You can really cover a room with a second transmitter," says



Magnetic motion capture is relatively cheap, but the wires inhibit movement

which the x, y, and z antennae are wound, concentrically, while the receiver is comprised of three orthogonal antennae sensitive to DC magnetic fields.

In operation, initially all transmitting antennae are shut down, enabling the receivers to measure the x, y, and z co-ordinates of the earth's magnetic field. Then the x, y, and z transmitter antennae are fired up sequentially, with the receivers measuring the values



Actors' movements are transformed into slick animation: a US TV ad for Monopoly (top) and a rapping skeleton (above)

Scully. "Only one will be on at a time, and an actor will either be in close proximity to transmitter A or B, so if he walks out transmitter A's range, we turn it off and turn on B."

Despite the slower capture rate, "the lag," defined as the time difference between the start of the physical rotation of the receiver and the start of the output of its correct measurement, is a mere 8.5ms for position and orientation measurements and an even faster 4ms for angular output.



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transmitters strapped to the performer's body (again, at the joints). The transmitters are then sequentially triggered to produce a sound, with the receivers calculating the time it takes for each signal to reach them and triangulating a point in space for each marker.

The main drawbacks are that the resulting data set is not collected simultaneously and that the capture area is limited by the speed of sound. Echoes cause additional problems, the sampling rate is limited and the performer is hampered by the cabling necessary for the system's operation.

The two pre-eminent capture systems at the moment are magnetic (see previous page, pg. 51) and optical (see pg. 53). The magnetic system suffers from the same tethering problem as the acoustic one (as well as from the possibility of ferrous interference) but its relatively low cost and ability to produce realtime data ensure its continued survival. Optical systems use multiple cameras to track reflective markers. Although they're expensive, and there are problems with occlusion of the markers, they've had a great impact on the industry because of their tetherless operation, high-speed capture ability (up to 240 fps) and potential for multiple simultaneous captures.

Traditionally, motion capture has recorded positional data, simply translating the positions of markers into 3D spatial coordinates. The resulting data is then used to drive the control points of an inverse kinematic skeleton through a loose coupling arrangement. Loose coupling was found to be necessary because the markers were only monitoring the way the skin was behaving in motion, not the actual joint itself, and the correlation between the marker's motion and the desired motion of the skeletal joint was sometimes rather wayward. Therefore, the data set was only allowed to influence the skeleton, each joint of which had to be placed under certain constraints.

Accepted wisdom is that 23 markers is the minimum for human animation. "About 23 or 25," says Swanick. "You can probably get away with one less on the head, but the thing is, you want to define all your angles and your movements as easily as possible and not have to worry about it or have massive points to attach the model to. Twenty three without a proper ankle/toe arrangement, 25 with a proper one."

Once you get to that point, though, the amount of three dimensional data being recorded starts to get rather unwieldy, and it



Delphine's *Flashback* used roto-scopy, while Sega's *Virtua Fighter* (left), Namco's *Tekken* (right), and Delphine's *Crossfire* all employ modern motion capture techniques

becomes much easier to simply store the data set as a series of bone rotations around the skeleton's various joints.

Rotational data, such as that used in the Acclaim system (see pg. 55), new Motion Analysis software, and the Vicon 370, is also more accurate than simply tracking joint positions, leading to far more fluid animation.

roughly analogous to the human skeleton) can be directly used to drive a body segment model. From there, if need be, it can be massaged using inverse kinematic solutions.

"Capturing the data has actually become less of a challenge," says LeCoe. "The systems are pretty well understood, the marker sets are understood, and our optical system can give you a lot of detailed, clean displacement data. The problem was, when you tried to move the displacement data over to animation you ran into scaling and inverse kinematic issues. Now

we're releasing rotational output so you can get from our system either displacement or body segment orientations. The filters are being put in place by Wavefront, Alias, and SoftImage, so suddenly the 3D animators are going to have an easier time."

Dean LeCoe suggests that motion capture is

now growing up. If the diffusion of rotational approaches into turnkey packages marks the end of puberty, other developments are going to catapult it into fully fledged adulthood.

Although magnetic motion capture seems to be gradually diminishing into obsolescence, it would be wrong to regard optical systems as their natural successor. In some senses, especially considering the price differential, they are complementary technologies rather than competing ones. As Jack Scully says: "A couple of our customers, at Sega, for instance, use the magnetic tracker for their everyday quick and dirty work and then, when they want to do some high-speed maneuvers like martial arts, they'll go to an optical one."

Development in both

disciplines continues. "One of the complaints about the magnetic system has been the enormous number of cables and wires and power supplies," explains Scully. "From this summer you will see all of the cords and wires ending up in a single user-friendly chassis. That will have a user-friendly interface on the

"Sega, for instance, uses the magnetic tracker for quick-and-dirty work, but for high-speed maneuvers they'll go to an optical one"

front and interfaces to the host computer via SCSI or Ethernet, probably on a RS485, so the user will be able to pick which interface he wants to use and send the data right on to his or her SGI computer."

Optical systems

Optical motion capture has a different heritage to magnetic systems, originating in biological science labs as a tool to study flow dynamics. Its use in the entertainment industry is comparatively recent, with Dean LeCoe dating it to a radical shake up in the industry about two years ago.

"It was less of an invention and more of a convergence, between Silicon Graphic computers that had visual display capabilities and software including Wavefront, SoftImage, and Alias which mortals could actually run," he says.

Optical set-ups, such as Motion Analysis' ExpertVision HiRes 3D system, are not cheap, routinely costing three to four times more than magnetic capture technology. The principle is simple: an array of high-

resolution cameras equipped with strobed LED on-axis lighting sources tracks directionally reflective balls attached to the performer. The raw data is then trigonometrically analyzed in proprietary software and a stream of 3D spatial co-ordinates or rotational data produced.

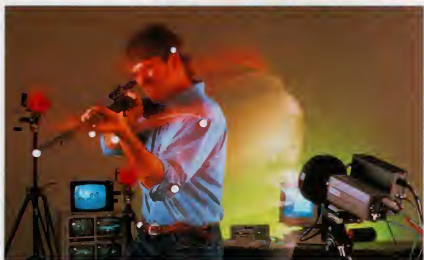
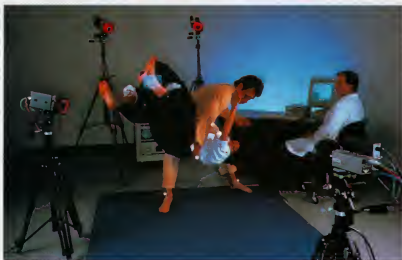
Despite its cost, optical motion capture has developed steadily due to its advantage

over magnetic technology. To start with, it's tetherless, allowing unrestricted movement for the performers over a capture area currently pushing 20x20 feet. Coupled with a sample rate of around 240 fps at the high end, it's ideal for capturing fast action, both for the entertainment industry and for biomechanical studies in the professional sports field. It can also currently track up to 100 markers, allowing the possibility of multiple simultaneous captures.

The downside is the risk of ghost markers (if cameras are misaligned), scaling problems, calibration difficulties, and processing time. And 3D optical motion capture is also not yet quite a realtime process, though 2D facial capture systems based on the technology now are. The most serious problem, though, is occlusion.

"If you fall over onto the floor and you block a marker you'll lose it because the cameras can't see it," explains Swanick. "But saying that, you only lose it for a short period of time, a fraction of the take, and you can do some processing — curve analysis and curve repairs — in order to regain it."

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UK-based Gremlin Interactive is one of the first UK software houses to establish a motion capture studio, using Motion Analysis' HiRes System. Sheffield Wednesday soccer player Chris Woods' movements were captured (center, center left) for inclusion in Gremlin's forthcoming *Actus Soccer*. Gremlin's studio has already been used by other companies, notably for the recent "virtual reality" television ad for Kit Kat

ng hardware

In the optical camp, the current goal is to increase the size of the capture area. Although Motion Analysis' capture area is approaching 20x20 ft, the push is on for even greater volume. The limiting factor, though, is the resolution of the cameras. If the cameras view a marker as less than a pixel in size, the data produced is going to be nowhere near accurate enough for smooth animation.

High-definition cameras are easing onto the market, but their high cost (around the \$15,000 to \$20,000 mark) currently prohibits their use in motion capture. That will change, and with the current breakthroughs taking place in HDTV, they should deliver a whole new magnitude of resolution capability. Add to that the migration of technology from ranging satellites into the field and it's a reasonable assumption that in a



Data processing is a crucial part of motion capture. Data is displayed in stick form for easy manipulation. Points that have been obscured can be corrected and other details added

lasers to triangulate depth based on reflected light and can complete a whole body scan in about 12 seconds. The results are impressive,



about it returning to its roots and throwing up VR applications.

"I believe that motion capture is going to move into a more personal realm," opines LeCoe. "There's a great future in game interfaces where the motion of the players themselves is captured, allowing them to transcend twitching fingers, pressing buttons, and pulling joysticks, and instead to physically participate in the game — bringing more of yourself into cyberspace."

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There's a great future in game interfaces where the player's motion is captured — bringing more of yourself into cyberspace

couple of years' time motion capture will be operating in football-sized stadiums.

As well as increasing the capture area, there's another hurdle waiting to be cleared. "The next frontier," says LeCoe, "is multiple-character simultaneous capture — and don't let anybody tell you it's easy. First you saw things like the Acclaim promotion, where you had two people with guns walk into the area separated by five or six feet. The next leap forward was that Motion Analysis did some kick-boxing stuff, and to do that interaction with all the physics and neurology of it by keyframe is almost impossible. If you capture the kinetics of the people you get a much better result. Now we're trying to get to where people grapple with each other and you can still peel them apart, and that takes a lot of intelligent tracking and tools."

It's probably not too far off, though. When people talk about progress in motion capture they tend to speak in terms of months rather than years. With the industry on the verge of Plug & Play, more and more character animation is going to be up to the standard of the likes of *Alien Trilogy*. However, other developments in complementary technology will soon make even that apex seem primitive.

One of those developments is full-body scanning. Cyberware recently rolled out the WB2 and WB4, both of which are capable of a full-color scan of an object in a capture area 2m by 1.2m. The scanners use up to four

producing a single-skin model ready for direct porting into animation packages. Although the technology isn't cheap (the WB4 is around \$457,000), the USAF is known to have acquired one, and there are rumors that Acclaim has taken the same route.

But fluid character

animation may well prove to be one of the least impressive of motion capture's many by-products. Some of the technology that arose out of tracking systems for HMDs, and many people are now starting to talk



Cyberware's full body scanner (top right). A facial scanner was used to capture the data for this 3D portrait (left). Facial markers can be used to capture human expressions in realtime (right)

The Acclaim approach

Earlier this year, **NEXT Generation** was invited to visit Acclaim's motion capture studio, a gymnasium-sized set-up located in the basement of the company's spacious HQ in sleepy Glen Cove, New York.

The studio is dominated by the main capturing stage, which is 59 feet long, 43 feet wide, and 24 feet high. There's also a smaller scanning room, used to capture facial expressions and small hand movements. Although specifically set up for head scanning, the room is currently being converted for body scanning and close capturing. Acclaim will eventually be able to put as many as 300 sensors on an actor's face to record facial animation and lip-sync.

Because Acclaim uses optical technology, the main stage is completely clad in black rubber. The cameras are high-res, rigid-mounted units, custom-made by TI. Acclaim's proprietary system comprises four black-and-white capturing cameras plus two slaves, used by the director to assess the performance.

The capturing process itself is fairly straightforward. Performers don black

suits featuring an adjustable number of rubber sensors (from 10 to 150), each of which has a ball of Scotchlite tape at its end to reflect light back to the source. The capturing process begins with a video shoot, after which each camera's output is digitized simultaneously to create a raw point file. Proprietary biomechanical algorithms are then applied to produce the bone rotation data.

As Acclaim's Wes Trager attests, bone rotation has many advantages: "It gives us really high-resolution character animation. What we did was to create a new format for the skeleton and the motion data to drive the skeleton, and then have the industry adopt these formats so that our customers have an easy means of getting their data into their particular software package."

These algorithms are clearly the key to Acclaim's highly realistic end product. Gamers will be able to see how they perform in a gaming environment with the release of Frank Thomas' "Big Hurt" *Baseball* and the much talked-about *Alien Trilogy*.




Acclaim's games make use of both motion capture and bluescreen techniques



Acclaim's forthcoming *Alien Trilogy*. First, Vasquez' face is scanned and some basic sweeping movements are captured optically. This data forms the basis for a wireframe model, onto which textures are then added





***"They say there's
a parallel universe.
Pray it isn't mine."***



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Madden NFL '96 **multiple** Loaded **PS-X** Center Ring Boxing **Saturn** Star Ranger **PC** VR Baseball **multiple** Earth Siege II **PC (Win 95)** Ripper **PC** Ironblood **M2** ClayFighter III **M2** Max Surge **PC** 3D Realms **PC**

alphas

Hot previews of upcoming games

The death of 16-bit games may not be upon us yet, but the flow of Super NES and Genesis titles is drying up: There is not one 16-bit title among the following 12 previews. For the definitive verdict on shipped products, see our review section, finals, on page 110.

60 Madden '96 **PS-X, PC, SATURN**

Can the hegemon of 16-bit sports games continue its dominance in the 32-bit arena?

64 Loaded **PLAYSTATION**

This new top-down shooter offers an overdose of blood, guts, and bodies

69 Center Ring Boxing **SATURN**

JVC gets its foot in the next generation sports door with an innovative boxing title

72 Star Ranger **PC**

Interactive Magic takes space combat to a new level. Can *Wing Commander* keep up?

75 VR Baseball **SATURN, PC, PS-X**

The start of something big? Interplay's VR Sports division ramps up

79 Earth Siege II **PC (WIN 95)**

Fighting is cool. Robots are cool. And fighting robots are even cooler

83 Ripper **PC**

Take 2 takes another swipe at the FMV adventure, and it may have done things right

86 Ironblood **3DO M2**

Can the graphic power of 3DO's M2 reduce the other systems' fighting games to rubble?

90 ClayFighter III **3DO M2**

Can Interplay's exclusive M2 gamble pay off? If looks are any indication, probably

94 Maximum Surge **PC**

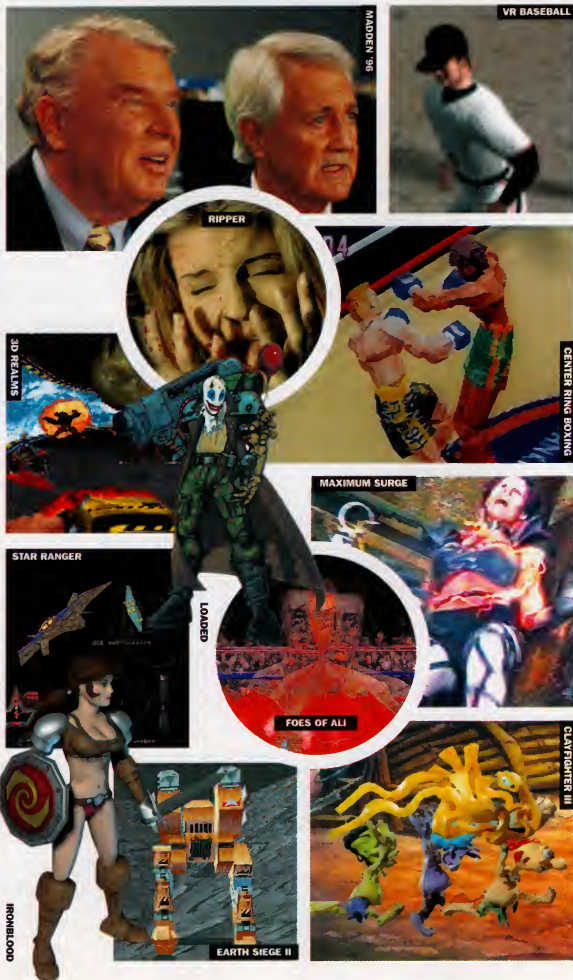
Digital Pictures combines FMV with computer graphics for some real gameplay

99 3D Realms **PC**

Apogee, the publishers of the original *Doom*, has a new 3D trick up its sleeves

106 Foes of Ali **3DO**

If double-vision, nausea-inducing views, and lots of blood mean realism, then this is it



Madden NFL '96

Format: **PlayStation
Saturn, PC**

Publisher: **EA Sports**

Developer: **Stormfront
Studios and
Visual Concepts**

Release Date: **November '95**

Origin: **US**



Madden NFL '96's graphics are light years beyond anything that could be done with games at the 16-bit level

This isn't just any football game — this is *Madden*, the title that revolutionized the sports game genre and, some claim, single-handedly established the Genesis' early 16-bit dominance. The first game to have the actual players' numbers — the NFLPA (National Football League Players' Association) license for player names didn't come until later — *Madden* heralded a new era of realism in electronic football and launched Electronic Arts' sports division into a position of market dominance.

So what is EA doing with its franchise to ensure that gamers continue to equate *Madden* with football in the 32-bit realm? Its goal is total realism. But what's interesting is the company's definition of realism. Rather than trying

Rendered helmets, FMV wisecracks, Fox TV half-time reports. Is this what we wanted in a football game?



to duplicate the true feel of being down on the field, EA is attempting to recreate football as most of us experience it — on TV.

"We're attempting to create the total interactive Sunday afternoon experience," says Mike Rubenelli, executive producer of *Madden* on PlayStation, Saturn,

and the PC. "You see the pregame report, the halftime report, you play the game. You hear the play-by-play, the color commentary, everything." There are more than 30 minutes of video and 20 minutes of audio in the game, including everything from sideline updates on field conditions and injuries to Pat Summerall's Thanksgiving Day turkey leg awards. In addition to *Madden* and Summerall, announcers Leslie Visser and James Brown (not the Godfather of soul) also appear in the game.

As expected, the graphics are where the game shows the most improvement. All the players are 3D, built with polygons, and animated using Biovision's motion-capture technology. EA used real NFL players for the motion capture, and more importantly, digitized the players in their actual positions — a



Madden features rendered helmets for each team, and as much audio and video footage as possible

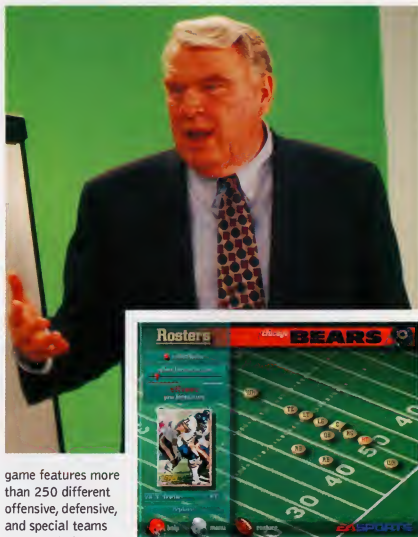
"We're attempting to create the total interactive Sunday afternoon experience," says Mike Rubenelli, executive producer of Madden

cornerback was used to capture his moves for cornerbacks, a wide receiver was used for wide receivers, and so on.

Although the gameplay is still functionally 2D, the world of *Madden* is true 3D. This makes for the largest update in graphics and gameplay — multiple camera angles. There are six default angles, all of which change on the fly. The field also tilts slightly; for example, when you drop back to pass, the camera zooms out and the field tilts down slightly, enabling you to see 45 to 50 yards downfield. When you run, the camera zooms in and the field flattens slightly, enabling you to see how your blocks are panning out. EA's *FIFA Soccer* proved the viability of intelligent camera angles with on-the-fly switching, and it's pinned high hopes on these same techniques in *Madden '96*.

Another area that has improved is the number of players, plays, and teams. In addition to all the 1996 teams, including the Carolina and

Jacksonville expansion outfits, the game has all 29 Super Bowl champs, the All-Madden team, and thanks to a licensing deal with the Hall of Fame, several teams (like the '73 Buffalo Bills) and players (like, yes, O.J. Simpson) who previously were unavailable in any football title. In all, *Madden* features more than 100 teams and more than 600 players, each with realistic ratings and abilities. The



game features more than 250 different offensive, defensive, and special teams plays, including custom plays for each team.

A General Manager mode is provided, letting you trade, waive, and sign players. As in previous versions, you can let the AI run every play and confine

John Madden's FMV analysis plays heavily in the game (top). There are more than 250 plays in the game (above)



All 30 US stadiums in the NFL are featured in true 3D (above). The players only look better when the camera zooms in (left). Character animation being tested in the lab (above left)

ng alphas



Real NFL players were used for motion capturing (above). Redskins Ken Harvey with nodes (above right)



Ken Harvey
Washington Redskins

is a radical new paradigm of gameplay for 32-bit gaming, *Madden '96* is not where it will be found.

Despite an unprecedented number of competitors (Sega Sports, Interplay's VR Sports, Konami, Sony Imagesoft, and Acclaim, all have 32-bit football games coming), there is little doubt the strength of *Madden's* reputation will generate anything less than a massive hit for Electronic Arts. But are increased production values all that 32-bit processing and the storage potential of CD-ROMs can offer football?

Madden '96 is likely to be a great game, but it may not give a definitive answer to that question.

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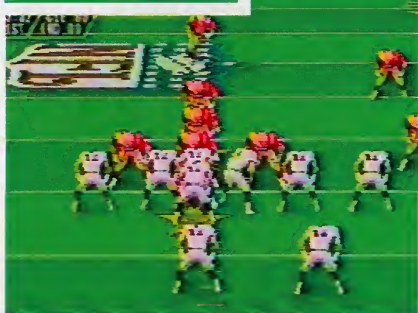
The question remains as to what could have been made if resources applied to making the game an immersive TV experience had been applied to gameplay



After being captured onto film, the many motions of the players are applied to 3D models (above)

yourself to a coaching role, if desired. This is where the PC and console versions differ most. While the PlayStation and Saturn versions, which EA feels will appeal mainly to current owners of platform systems, feature more arcade-style play, the PC CD-ROM is, in the words of Rubenelli, "very PC CD-ROMish." Translation: the PC version places more emphasis on strategy, tactics, and stats, which EA hopes will please the PC's older demographic group. The PC CD-ROM also features the "Madden University," a multimedia primer into football strategy featuring John, himself, and NFL films footage.

Overall though, EA has taken an "if-it-ain't-broke, don't-fix-it" attitude toward *Madden* in '96, and has done little to alter the actual play of the game. "We want to give the user the 16-bit gameplay feel with the 32-bit graphic look," says Rubenelli. But while the previous versions of *Madden* were excellent games, the question remains as to what could have been developed if the resources applied to making the game an immersive TV experience had been applied to gameplay. Additionally, if there



The main difference between *Madden NFL '96* and a TV football broadcast is the view of the field — you look upfield from behind the quarterback, not from a camera mounted on the sidelines, as in real television

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you don't have a
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TEEN



AGES 13+

ORIGIN

Loaded

Format: **PlayStation**
 Publisher: **Interplay**
 Developer: **Gremlin**
 Release Date: **Fall**
 Origin: **UK**

The PlayStation has had its fair share of maze shooters, but so far none has approached *Doom* standard. Gremlin's latest creation could get a little closer

With the strong desire to enhance its reputation in the 32-bit market, Gremlin has been tempted by the new consoles to return to the fray with a vengeance (and new hopes of success). The result is *Loaded*, a game aspiring to the playability of *Doom* and *Gauntlet* while lavished with 32-bit production values.

Loaded is a top-down blaster, pure and simple. The plot, as usual, is irrelevant to the gameplay, but it does provide an excuse for plenty of carnage. You play one of six gun-toting mercenaries attempting to break out of a prison to fulfill the evil plans of its owner. Extreme violence is, of course, crucial to this task: enemies collapse into pools of blood with a satisfying squelch and there are plenty of meaty weapon power-ups.

The prison consists of 12 vertically stacked levels. A top-down perspective is used throughout, which provides a clear view of the action. The



The forced-perspective, top-down display facilitates control of your chosen character

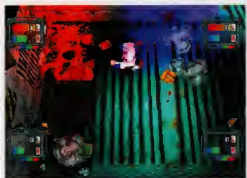
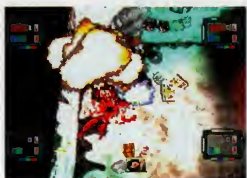
only drawback is that it also lets you see the denizens of the next rooms, thereby reducing the suspense as the door slides open — which is what made *Doom* such an intense experience.

Gremlin has made every effort to create a 3D environment by including *Clockwork Knight*-style parallax scrolling and perspective-scaling ramps and stairs in the level design — whenever you ascend or descend, the

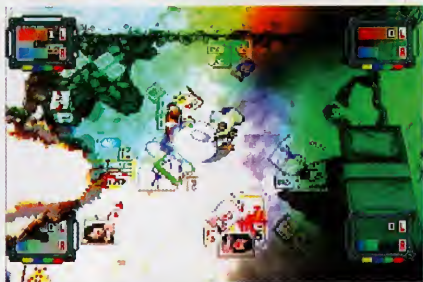
***Loaded* is a top-down blaster, pure and simple. The plot, as usual, is irrelevant to the gameplay, but it does provide an excuse for plenty of carnage**



Each of the six characters in the game has a unique weapon, which can be powered up five times to produce spectacular explosions like these (left). And this is the heartwarming result: liquidized enemies (right)



Yet more enemies are dispatched with maximum gore (top and middle). An explosion lights up the room (above)



Some of these security doors can only be opened with the right access card (top). Psychedelic swirlings à la *Jumpin' Flash!* (above)



The blood in *Loaded* may be cartoonish rather than realistic (*Doom* is much nastier) but it's still suitably violent



The scaling routines in *Loaded* are some of the best seen so far on the PlayStation. When the view zooms out, the lighting remains accurate and annoying pixelation is kept to a bare minimum

view zooms in or out with an impressive lack of pixelation.

Each room is gaudily colored, marking a departure from the dark, dungeonsque environments of other maze games like *Kileak: The DNA Imperative*, *Doom* and *Space Griffon*. And the day-glo interior design looks even more impressive when weapons are fired, their flashes casting eerie shadows on the walls.

The weakest aspect of *Loaded* is arguably its character design. In the game proper you get badly defined sprites with little or no recognizable traits (largely because the viewpoint restricts what can be seen), while the character artwork (depicting the likes of Fwank, Nobby, Cap'n Hands, Vox!, Mamma, and Bouncin') is unsubtle and seems somehow overdesigned.

Loaded enables four players to join forces, *Gauntlet*-style, courtesy of the PlayStation link-up cable. However, Gremlin has deliberately chosen to keep the gameplay as simple as possible and

the tactical element is unlikely to be as sophisticated as it was in Atari's masterpiece.

Whether *Loaded* will offer enough challenge and variety to match its visuals will be apparent when it debuts later this year. But the fact that Gremlin has chosen to exploit the 2D potential of the PlayStation as well as its 3D muscle will give the machine some much-needed diversity.

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SO HERE'S A WORD OF UNLUCKY PEOPLE WHO CASH ON A BRAND K.I. CLEARLY DELIVERS ON 16-BIT, DOWN TO



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It's gonna be a bloody free-for-all... and that's just in the game aisle at the store.



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your weapons...



...just don't
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35 minutes of
video explains how
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saves the King and
is rewarded with
the old man's
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mobs of ravenous
Hordings, each
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See, we've injected arcade-style,
belly-slitting fun into that
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serious, gut-popping swordplay.
'Cause man, these neighbors
really bite!



(Game Pro 3000™ review)



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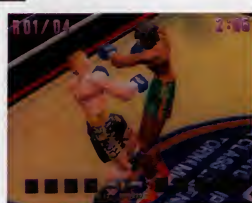
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Buy games and accessories with this seal to be sure that they are compatible with the Sega Saturn™ System.



Center Ring

Boxing

We expect good sports titles to appear on a Sega machine. But who would have thought it would be JVC bringing them to us?



The multiple viewing angles keep the fights intense, and the well-rendered and shaded boxers ensure things look good, too

Format: **Saturn**
 Publisher: **JVC**
 Developer: **JVC**
 Release Date: **February '96**
 Origin: **Japan**



A full round replay mode will be included in the final version

Gamers have been crying out for full, 3D polygon treatment in boxing games since the days of *4D Boxing* on the PC. And now *Center Ring Boxing* may very well deliver the same kind of boxing game that New's *Boxer's Road* is developing for PlayStation, for the Saturn—a full, multiple-camera, customizable, 3D boxing experience.

Center Ring features three different combat modes: Main Event, in which you can fight your way through 30 different opponents in a quest to become world champ; the obvious two-player "VS" mode; and a special Sparring training mode, wherein you improve your own fighter's reaction times, and more. According to JVC, your

fighters will become more "skilled" with experience, making it easier to execute special combos and other moves. You can create and save 10 custom boxers (assuming you have a memory cartridge), setting various attributes from speed to stamina, even height, weight, and whether your boxer is right-handed boxer or a south paw.

There are more than 10 camera angles in the game, which are switchable during gameplay, and one full round is available for instant replay at any time. One of the most anticipated features of the game is the plethora of abilities contained within each of the other boxers. The 30 opponents you face in Main Event mode are not carbon copies of each other, each has a very distinct style: some are quick jabbers who sap your strength slowly and some go for the massive knock-out punch.

If everything continues according to plan, at its release date in February, *Center Ring* looks like it could do for boxing games what *Daytona USA* did for racing games.



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Center Ring will provide sports games for the Saturn at a crucial time

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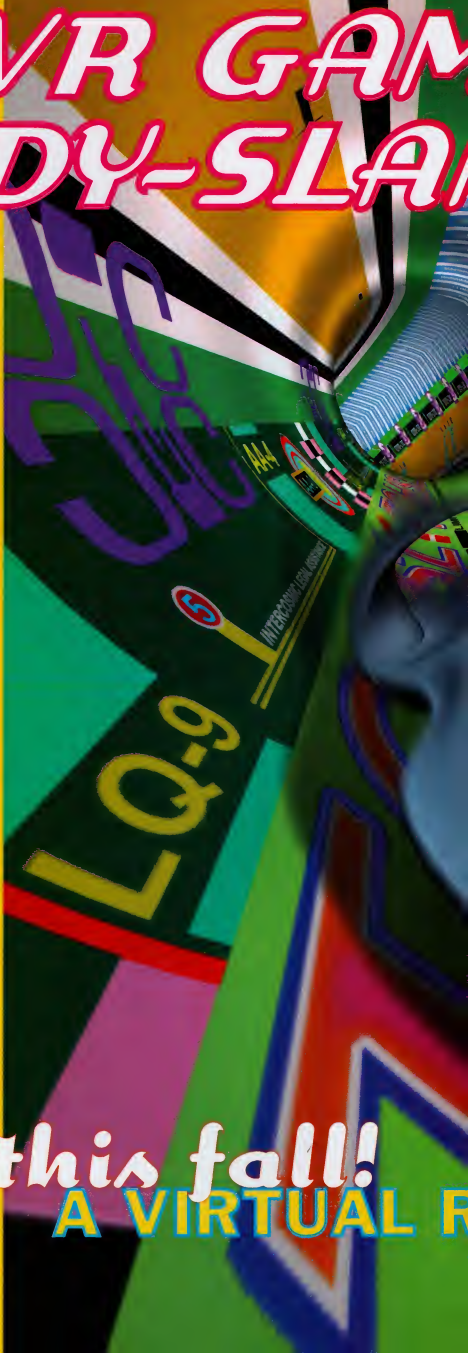
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QUALITY SPORTSGAME

ng alphas

Star Rangers

Format: PC

Publisher: Interactive Magic

Developer: Interactive Magic

Release Date: October

Origin: US

Newcomers Interactive Magic look for a new angle on the well-worn space-combat genre



Choices, choices, choices. Producer Michael Chen wants the player to follow his or her own path, not preplanned ones. If you stake out a wise strategy and forgo through multiple battles in *Star Rangers*, you're given medallions (above)

W

ild Bill Steely is back after a contractually forced hiatus from the entertainment software industry, and he's pooled

together a talented group of programmers and artists looking to produce the kind of games that made his last company, Microprose, great. His new start-up, Interactive Magic, is promising to set aside the fluff and cinematics that have become the center stage of most new PC releases, and to concentrate on developing flight sims and strategy titles that deliver good old-fashioned fun.

One of the first games to make it out of the gates of the fledgling company, *Star Rangers* is a pleasing mix of a fast-moving space-combat sim (à la *Wing Commander*) and a full-on tactical strategy game. Although there aren't any real technological breakthroughs being made here, there's absolutely no doubt that the company has crafted a title possessing that addictive quality capable of impressing a wide audience of gamers.

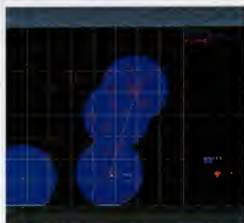
The basic idea behind *Star Rangers* is to create a space sim that permits the



Space travel should present an excellent sense of realism and speed at a rapid 40 fps, as you cruise around with your sole wingman defending your quadrant and attacking your enemies' (left). Screen readouts help combat planning (below)



player a choice in where his or her next mission might take place. Starting out as lowly ensigns, gamers will at first begin exploring their quadrant, will then engage a few enemies, and finally plot out the best way to eliminate them all and win the game. In a recent interview, *Star Rangers* producer Michael Chen explains how the teams ideas took form:



You'll have to get used to doing some navigating if you want to succeed in *Star Rangers* (above). The dogfighting is satisfying because you get to see your kills up close and personal (top, top right, and far right)



"We were trying to make a break from the genre that tells you where you have to be and when. You had to be able to blow things up real good and we wanted fantastic explosions that you could see. Kills beyond visual range aren't fun."

As the game evolves, decisions must be made as to the most important areas of the quadrant to protect, the best way to use your sole wingman, and how to use the limited number of munitions at your disposal to maximum efficiency. In the end, the winning player will not only have to possess the skill to defend his own bases, but will also need the guts and luck necessary to successfully strike out against the enemy in his own territory.

The action element of *Star Rangers* isn't anything you haven't seen before, but it is done well.

Interactive Magic claims that play runs at least 40 frames per second (fps) throughout the game, even when dealing with multiple texture-mapped, Gouraud-shaded enemies, and several explosions at a 640x480 resolution. All of the gameplay models were rendered in 3D studio, creating a slick look that well suits the futuristic feel of the title. After locating an enemy, everything is straightforward: players launch into classic dogfight tactics looking to plow into their opponent with anything from standard ship guns, projectiles, and missiles with the explosive force of a

nuclear weapon. With the most basic of fighting skills mastered, players will then need to figure out the strategy portion of the game in order to move forward in the story.

The most important strategy tool players will have at their disposal is the star map. On the chart, the player and friendly craft are represented by small blue dots, enemy craft by small red dots. Sensor range is limited to small circles around friendly attack ships and bases, and around small transponders that can be dropped by friendlies in the opponent's territory. With 17 different mission types, a random generator for placement of all units, along with promotions and medals award for meritorious service, the gameplay's variation will keep gamers coming back.

Star Rangers doesn't show off any level of strategy or

action that hasn't been done somewhere else before, but if this game is an example of the gameplay Interactive Magic has hidden in its wings, then in the eyes of hard-core gamers, its future is almost guaranteed.

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The space combat scenes are really nothing new in terms of gameplay, but having the freedom to choose when and where to go by yourself adds a new level of control to the game (above)

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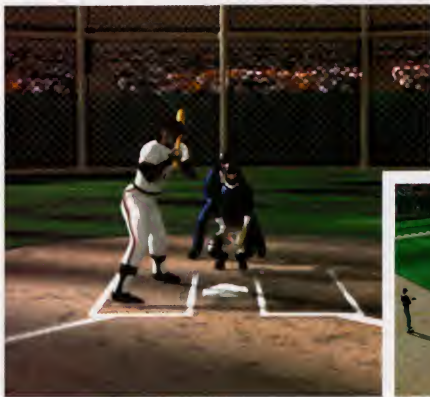
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VR Baseball

InterPlay steps up to the plate with a new sports line boasting 3D rendered polygons, texture maps, and multiple camera angles



Featuring "Virtual Fieldvision," a 360° view mode, VR Baseball will enable players to see from multiple angles



A successful sports game franchise is like a license to print money, so it's no surprise that Interplay has jumped into the act with its new VR Sports division. A not so successful sports game franchise, on the other hand, is a lot like having the license to Congo, so again it's no surprise that VR Sports is going all out to make sure that its products are absolutely top-flight.

VR Baseball, its first effort, is a polygon-based baseball game with

Format:	Sega Saturn
Publisher:	VR Sports
Developer:	VR Sports
Release Date:	TBA
Origin:	US

When this title is fully completed, VR Baseball will feature all the current major league teams and players

several new features, including multiple camera angles and something called "Virtual Fieldvision," a totally new 360° view mode. The game will provide all the expected features: real teams, real players, and real statistics, as well as the new divisional alignment and a general manager mode that enables you to keep abreast of real-life trades. There will be also be a feature for All-Star games, teams, and a home run derby.

Will VR Sports enable Interplay to play with the monsters of the sports software world, Sega Sports, and EA? Releasing its baseball title first is a smart move; despite Sega's success with its *World Series* line, no one yet has a *Madden*-like hold on the baseball market. If VR Sports can gain a beachhead in the 32-bit market with baseball, it may be able to fell the giants of the sports market and step forward with its own dynasty.



Texture-mapped 3D polygons put sprite-based games to shame. VR Baseball will have the players' actual faces mapped onto their characters

It's no surprise that VR Sports is going all out to make sure that its products are absolutely top-flight



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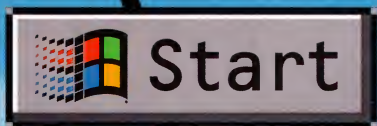
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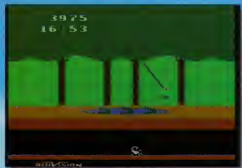
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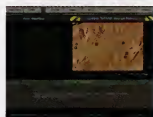
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Earthsiege II: Skyforce

One of the first major releases for Windows 95, *Skyforce* proves that Microsoft's interface can hack it as a gaming platform

Format: **Windows 95**
 Publisher: **Sierra**
 Developer: **Sierra**
 Release Date: **TBA**
 Origin: **US**



Mission planning and (top) Briefing (second), Prototype (third), and Outfitting windows (fourth) are available

In the late '80s, Activision released *Mechwarrior*, a game of giant robots battling it out in a dark future, introducing FASA's highly successful role-playing world to computer users. As the company prepared to release its sequel, Dynamix stepped in and managed to release two more 'mech combat games, *Earthsiege* and *Battledrome*, introducing their own

universe and terminology (calling the robots HERCS saves on copyright lawyers). Now that *Mechwarrior 2* is finally on the shelves, Dynamix is preparing to up the ante again with a hi-resolution sequel for Windows 95.

Like *Earthsiege*, *Earthsiege 2* is a full-on simulator of machinery that doesn't really exist. Even so, the developers have placed as much emphasis on realism as they would in any of their more traditional WWII flight sims. The result is a game that can be played as a simple shooter, or as a deep campaign, by virtue of a career mode providing you with 50 missions, ranging from simple find-and-destroy jobs to more subtle espionage tasks. As the game progresses, you'll find yourself behind the controls of



This cockpit shot shows the Multifunctional Display, which eliminates manic middle-of-combat display changes (top)

ng alphas



Notice the smooth rendered backgrounds and intricate looking HERCS. Roiling hills provide nice defense

more powerful HERCS (there are 12 different units to choose from), and the deadly Razor, an aircraft that can soar above the battlefield, launching strafing attacks on the land-locked enemy.

Although there's no doubt that *Earthsiege* was a fantastic sim, there was plenty of room to introduce improvements. On the graphics side, the developers were able to work past the resource demands of the new Win 95 interface and deliver a high-res SVGA display in both shell and sim at a 640x480 resolution (don't get too excited, only Pentiums or high performance 486 machines with a local bus graphics card will be able to run in this mode). Every unit in the game has been built with full light-sourced and

With intricate craters and varying terrain, *Skyforce's* mix of graphics and campaign strategy make for a well-balanced sequel



Gouraud-shaded, texture-mapped polygons. In addition, although full details have not yet been worked out, there will be at least three better-than-average cinematic sequences in the game.

Two of the most noticeable changes are the addition of another MFD (multifunctional display), which eliminates frantic display changes in the middle of combat; and the system's new "smart changer," which automatically selects an appropriate MFD mode pertinent to what the player is doing at the moment (select a new target and the computer will choose radar mode; take a hit and the computer selects damage reports). But the biggest change of all is in the way *Earthsiege 2* handles terrain. Unlike the original, which was basically a flat surface with various 3D objects placed on it, *Skyforce* will offer a true 3D terrain that will enable you to walk up and down hills, obtain a height advantage in combat, and to launch surprise attacks on an enemy.

With Windows 95 now on shelves, there's sure to be a rush of new releases for it. With *Earthsiege 2*, Dynamix crafted a game not only specifically designed for the new interface, but one that will stand up against any DOS game. The ball looks like it's now back in Activision's court.

ng



Skyforce's HERCS selection is impressive (above). This screen enables outfitting and wingmen choices (inset)

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Ripper

With an investment of more than 25 person-years and \$2.5 million, Take 2 hopes to singlehandedly smash the stereotype that FMV equals "terrible game"



oping to make a paradigm leap past *Hell*, its previous graphic adventure, Take 2 dives into the realm of FMV with its newest title

Ripper. In it, there will be more than two hours of video spread across the four CDs of the game, featuring some very big names. The game stars Christopher Walken as tough-guy detective Vincent Magnotta, and features a fairly impressive supporting cast, including Burgess Meredith, Jimmy "dyno-mite" Walker, and John Rys-Davies (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Wing Commander III*). The video segments were directed by Phil Parmet, who recently worked with Quentin Tarantino on *Four Rooms* and features a soundtrack by Blue Oyster Cult.

But despite the attention paid to the video elements of the game (nearly 25% of the budget was spent on the actors' salaries), this isn't going to be a pure video experience, à la *Night Trap* or *Johnny Mnemonic*. "This is a game that

Format: **PC, Mac, PlayStation**

Publisher: **Take 2 Interactive**

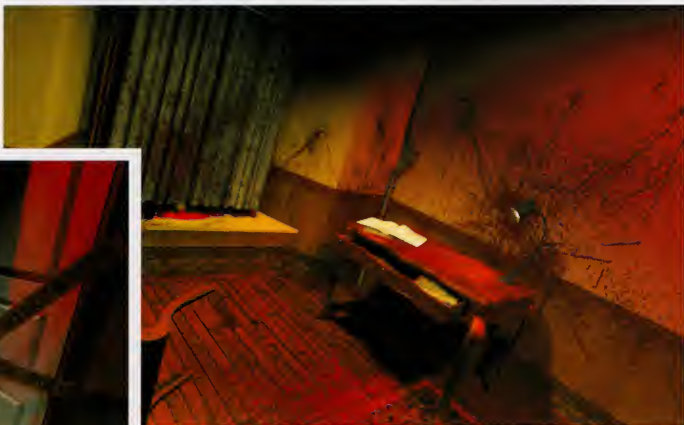
Developer: **Take 2 Interactive**

Release Date: **November**

Origin: **US**

has video in it, it's not an 'interactive movie,'" says lead designer and writer F.J. Lennon. In fact, he says that the game would be just as enjoyable as a text adventure, although he maintains that the video makes the game more story-driven. "The whole industry wants to crucify FMV, people claim FMV doesn't belong in games, but if it's done professionally, I think it can work," he adds. In *Ripper*, you see videos only when interacting with other characters in the game. Other than that, you maneuver through the 3D-rendered

Set in the 21st century, you play Quinlin, a crime reporter who finds himself getting too close to his latest story



Seedy apartments and other well thought-out props set up by Take 2 Interactive provide the ideal scenarios for your 21st century crime detective. You are Quinlin, and it is your job to solve the case of a series of bloody murders closely resembling those of Jack the Ripper. Have fun...

ng alphas



Making an appearance in this game is Burgess Meredith, who will undoubtedly provide his more than ample and realistic edge (top). Just possibly, there are some scenes that, well, do take a little stomach (second from top). A suspect gets the treatment from our hero (third). Quinlin argues the case (at right, above)



game environment in a forward-scrolling first-person perspective. If there's a right way to FMV, this is it.

Another thing that separates *Ripper* from your average FMV-bomb is the plot — it's actually good, with plenty of twists and surprises. Set in the mid-21st century, you play Quinlin, a crime reporter, who finds himself getting too close to his latest story — a series of unexplained, bloody murders that bear an uncanny resemblance to those of Jack the Ripper. First his partner is attacked and only barely survives, comatose. And now it seems he may be next on the *Ripper's* list. The plot thickens when you begin to discover strange connections between the darkest regions of hacker-controlled cyberspace and the murders — connections that might explain why certain people are being less than helpful in getting to bottom of the murders. What is it Magnotta and others don't want you to know about their pasts?

The game is also largely nonlinear. Although it's divided into four distinct acts, you can do almost whatever you want, when you want, during the acts. There are also around 40 real puzzles in the game, as well as a few (thankfully short) arcade-style combat sequences. Sources at Take 2 said the game would take about 30 hours to complete, for an "average" gamer. More importantly, the puzzles are actually well-integrated with the storyline, a refreshing change from the trend we've seen with games like *7th Guest*.



While *Ripper's* special effects can be extremely gory, they keep things engaging; notice the strangely covered body (above). The video segments were all shot on blue screen. Everything else is a rendered three-dimensional model

Take 2 created an engine from scratch, using several techniques to keep the graphic quality high: switching on the fly from 640x480 to 320x200 res, using custom color tables, and double width screens for the combat sequences.

Take 2 may establish some new respect for the often-ridiculed medium. The question remains as to whether video clips offer the flexibility and speed to be worth the trouble of fitting them to an established game. However, *Ripper* may come up with some answers of its own.



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ng alphas

Ironblood

The first M2 fighter won't just show off the new system's power, it hopes to add new dimensions to the genre

Format:	M2
Publisher:	Take 2 Interactive
Developer:	Take 2 Interactive
Release Date:	Spring '96
Origin:	US



On paper, *Ironblood* looks like your standard next generation fighter. It features 3D arenas, 3D-polygonal texture-mapped characters, and multiple-camera perspectives. But when the title ships (the date is dependent on 3DO's plans), this flagship M2 product could substantially redefine status quo expectations for the fighting genre.

Ironblood offers a new setting, taking the fighters out of the realms of martial arts and into the Tolkien-esque, offering such player-characters as dwarves, elves, werewolves, and goblins, and classes like paladins, thieves, and shamens. Characters have an alignment, either to Order or Chaos, and there are 16 playable characters in total: 8 Knights of Order, 8 Warriors of Chaos and 4 bosses; and there's a Minion and Lord of both Chaos and Order. At the outset of a one-player game you select whether to fight for Law



The hallmark of *Ironblood* is close contact weapons based on fantasy-world fighting (above). As with any fantasy (or fighting) title, there is the prerequisite scantily clad Amazon warrior. Why don't female fighters get to wear armor?

or Chaos, and you can pick from among the eight characters of your alignment. While you're choosing, the characters are animated, practicing combat moves, stretching, and boasting of their skills.

After beating the eight characters of your enemies' alignment, you face that alignment's Minion, and if you beat him without losing a round, or have defeated the previous eight characters without losing a match, you then face the Lord of the alignment. And because every attack



a Lord makes is a special move, the game makes up for having only two bosses by making the last boss nearly impossible to defeat.

The characters all have fairly varied styles of attack, most carry weapons, and some can cast spells or attack with claws and teeth. Thanks to the Z-buffering abilities of the M2 hardware and the raw power of its 66 MHz PowerPC 602 RISC processor (NG 06), Take 2 is planning for the detail in character



Note the likeness of the rendered figure (top) to these stills of characters from game screens; Each shows off the immense detail of which the M2 is capable (above). Fighters Klnoba, the warrior; Torgo, the dwarf; and Nym Pymplee, the goblin (clockwise from top left)



design to be stunning, and to contain some of the best 3D models seen yet in a fighting game, with thousands of texture-mapped polygons per character. The game also features M2's hardware lighting effects and realtime shadows on the characters. Additionally, use of M2's destination-based texture mapping keeps the speed of the game extremely fast.

The coolest element of the game will come into play during two-player combat. Although you can play the traditional VS mode, Campaign mode makes things much more interesting. Each player takes turns selecting from the 16 characters. If you win the match, you capture your opponent's character. The campaign ends when one player has lost all his characters.

The most intriguing part of campaign mode, though, is that the loser of each match gets to choose the background for the next one. So what? The backgrounds in *Ironblood* are especially designed to benefit the loser of each match — he or she is awarded a special move on their "home turf," which adds a strategic element to the game. The possibilities for campaign games are immense. Thankfully, Take 2 will include a save option.

Some other elements sure to make *Ironblood* very likeable are the game's attention to little things. Evade or block too often and your character may get annoyed, turn toward the camera, and start to harass you; score 10 kills in a row and expect some bragging. You'll fight inside a circle of runes, and unlike *Battle Arena Toshinden* or *Tekken*, wherein

falling off the fighting platform ends the round, falling out of the ring in *Ironblood* merely knocks points off your health meter until you re-enter, which adds more strategy to the game.

While M2's future remains unclear (NG 09) and subject to wild rumor and speculation, according to

insiders at 3DO, development on M2 titles is continuing at a "healthy" pace. If so, then when (we don't want to say "if") the M2 ships, Take 2 Interactive hopes *Ironblood* will be the killer app the original 3DO never had.

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The design sketches give an impression of some of the other characters in the game





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Clayfighter III

Format: **M2**
 Publisher: **Interplay**
 Developer: **Interplay**
 Release Date: **December**
 Origin: **US**

Making a big bet with 3DO's M2, Interplay follows up a new and improved parody fighter — but with an adult sense of humor



While not necessarily the *Virtua Fighter* of fighting games in terms of its special moves and fighting techniques, *Clayfighter III* should look impressive and will certainly garner some good belly laughs with its twisted humor and bizarre set of characters

Wisely viewing the change in machinery as a change in audience, Interplay has also brought the level of humor to a more adult level

Interplay is making a big bet on the M2. By releasing the sequel to one of its hottest game properties exclusively for a system with such a nebulous existence, the company is placing itself in a very precarious position. If the machine does manage to take off, then *Clayfighter III* will be in the home of every new owner who's looking to buy. But a more pessimistic eye can envision a long development cycle and some truly creative design work going down the tubes with a sinking ship.

Like the earlier titles in the series, *Clayfighter III* is, at its heart, a parody of every fighting game ever made. The basic story pits the evil genius of Dr. Kiln, a world renowned "clayentologist" bent on world domination, against a host of doughy fighters, all armed to the teeth with humorous special attacks and fatalities. Included in the new cast are





old favorites like Bonker, the clown who likes to hurt people, Bad Mr. Frosty, an evil snowman gone good, and Blob, a formless fury of ooze, and all new combatants such as Zappa Yow Yow Boyz, a symbiotic trio of pygmies, and Houngan, the local voodoo doctor.

Wisely viewing the change in machinery as a change in audience, Interplay has also brought the level of humor to a more adult level. Hobocop flashes his opponent, LockJaw Pooch urinates on his fallen foes, and T-Hoppy lays into his enemies with fully automatic weaponry. Needless to say, this is not a game for unsupervised children... Additionally, each fighter has a multiple level background filled with hidden



secrets to encourage long-term play.

Although essentially a 2D fighting game, the cart uses scores of new programming tricks with backgrounds to create an impression of playing in a three-dimensional world. Using the M2's powerful PowerPC RISC chip, *Clayfighter III* displays its trademark claymation in 640x480x15-bit resolution, using texture-mapped objects in many of the game's backgrounds that display a different viewing angle as players move past them.

All of the fighters will cast real rendered shadows against the backdrop. The shadows are slightly transparent and realistically climb vertical surfaces on the background. To get the highest level of detail possible for each character, the team spent many frustrating hours in front of the video camera, taking single frame shots of actual clay models. Once cleaned up, the resulting images were fit together with animation to ensure fluid movement from one position to the next. Combined with a highly responsive interface, the resulting character motion is both attractive and easy to control.

Clayfighter III has a technological advantage that sets it apart from its peers, but from all early appearances, it looks like the game's greatest assets are its somewhat twisted (and adult) humor, and smooth character control.

As the following months spell out what the future holds for 3D and its mysterious new machine, one thing is sure — if the system succeeds, those risking the most now will reap the greatest benefits later.

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The effective fighting moves of the Zappa Yow Yow Boyz, a symbiotic trio of pygmies, are yet to be seen, though we're certain they will be funny (top). Bonker the clown (he's no bozo) bashes the rapid snout of LockJaw Pooch, effectively avoiding urination (right)



Clayfighter III's claymation-made creatures add a different look and feel to the fighting genre

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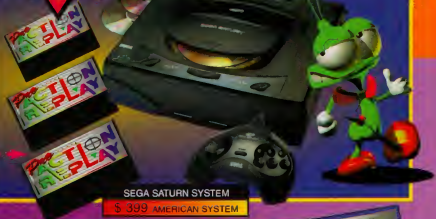
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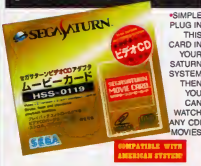
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Maximum Surge

Format: **PC**
 Publisher: **Digital Pictures**
 Developer: **Digital Pictures**
 Release Date: **December '95**
 Origin: **US**

Offering an editable video world, player controlled movement, and a Doom-like play-style, Maximum Surge appears to be an FMV game able to create some respect for the troubled genre

F MV (full-motion video) games have received a bad rap from games fans, and with good reason. Typically about as interactive as sitting in front of a TV switching channels, most games based on FMV have depended on their "real-life" graphics, rather than fully interactive play controls to impress their audience. Now, the team at Digital Pictures is trying to change all that. Offering PC users an editable video world, player controlled movement, and a play-style reminiscent of *Doom*, *Maximum Surge* appears to be an FMV game that actually may be able to create some respect for the genre.

Obviously, the quality of the images in *Maximum Surge* are excellent. The video-sourced graphics basically break down into three different types: 1) Inter-

Digital Pictures' creative new use of FMV could mark a turnaround for the technology, and make a hit of its new title

mission explanations starring Walter Koenig (Chekov from *Star Trek*) and Yasmine Bleeth ("Baywatch"); 2) hallway and intersection movement clips; 3) and action segments.

Yes, the action segments are also based on video-sourced material, but for



The alien characters move and react in an extremely life-like fashion during the action sequences (above). Walter Koenig (famous for his role as Chekov in the original "Star Trek") does a surprisingly good job in his interactive debut (left)



Alien characters are portrayed in classic sci-fi fashion. Uniforms supplied by Conan...



The last thing you want to do is let your comrade down (right). Watching bad guys blow up is one of the treats *Maximum Surge* provides (far right)



Although the resulting play doesn't give players as much of a feeling of freedom as *Doom* or *Descent*, there is a distinct payback in realism and replay value

the first time, up to four layers of video-sourced graphics can be placed on screen at the same time. The world of *Maximum Surge* is essentially made up of video-sourced elements and computer graphics combined — not simply video alone.

This is the principle and most fundamental difference between *Maximum Surge* and Digital Picture's previous FMV-based games.

Playing the game, your character receives his instructions, and you begin moving through the maze of the complex. Every now and again, you yourself in rooms infested with gun-wielding opponents.

The true gameplay of the title lies in ducking behind what cover the particular room offers, using the mouse to shoot as many opponents as possible without getting blasted in the process. Some foes may lie outside of your immediate field

of vision, necessitating an occasional look from left to right (yes, you can move around this FMV-based world, albeit only in four foot increments).

Enemies who were filmed in at least 100 different takes can attack in any combination, making it impossible for a player to just remember where the next attack is coming from. Although the resulting play doesn't give players as much of a feeling of freedom as a *Doom*, there is a distinct payback in the feeling of realism and replay value.

One of the greatest arguments for the side of FMV is that opponents can be made to act more lifelike than animation, and therefore deliver a more lifelike experience for the player. Amanda Lathroum, the producer of *Maximum Surge* explains: "Most people don't talk about the ways FMV is better than an animated game, but the targets you are shooting at, are real objects. Our actors can make mistakes, trip, and that sort of thing just like people would in real life."

"We've approached this title from the game point of view, not the movie point of view, and what that means practically is there's a lot of playability — the player is always making decisions."

Maximum Surge is definitely a step forward for FMV-based gaming, but this genre's future is still in question. Processing power is quickly increasing, and the advantages of video may soon be rendered obsolete by rendered on-the-fly 3D worlds. In the meanwhile, however, *Digital Pictures* is still pushing the envelope.

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Lots of characters get right in your face in typical Digital Pictures style (top). The special effects are also feature DP's standard attention to detail

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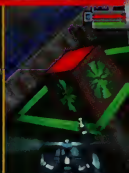


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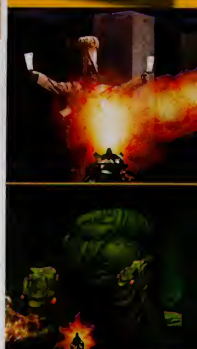
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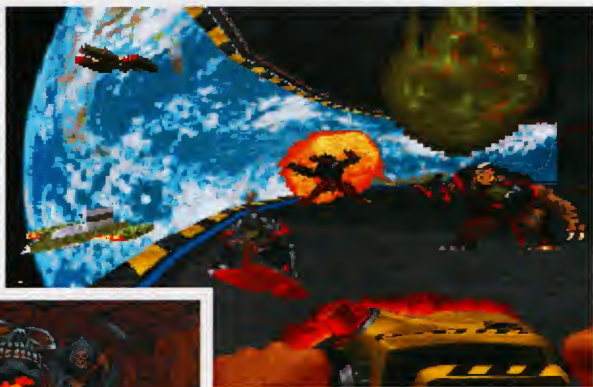
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Duke Nukem 3D (above),
Blood (left), and
Shadow Warrior (bottom left)

3D

Realms

Having raised a few eyebrows with *Terminal Velocity*, 3D Realms is now ready to take off. **NEXT Generation** makes its way to the Lone Star State, where the company is busy building a 3D empire

Forget swimming pools and conservatories — to get one over on the Joneses these days, it seems you've got to have your own 3D engine. Argonaut has just proudly put its *BRender* engine on display in *FX Fighter*. Washington DC-based Bethesda reckons its Xengine, to be used in the forthcoming *10th Planet* and *Dagerfall*, is at least three times faster than everyone else's. Id will doubtless have similarly wild claims to make about its *Quake* engine. And in the quiet suburbs of Dallas, Texas, 3D Realms is putting the finishing touches on its *Build* engine, which will, of course, be better still.

But, rather than 3D graphics technology or its recent success, *Rise Of The Triad*, 3D Realms is perhaps best known for pioneering



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the shareware concept of PC game publishing, through its alter ego, Apogee. Having spread cut-down shareware versions of Id's *Wolfenstein 3D* across the world's bulletin boards, it found that people were only too happy to send in their registration fees to obtain the full version. And Id, impressed by the success of the technique, exploited it to its full extent with *Doom*.

"We started marketing our games as shareware because it was an inexpensive way to get started," explains 3D Realms president George Broussard, a strategy that has now yielded the company success in the form of rapidly expanding offices and corridors.

"It's a method that works very well for us," adds Scott Miller, 3D Realms vice president and also, confusingly, Apogee's co-president. "And not just in terms of sales. We can put out an early beta version of a game and invite people to contact us with their opinions. If what they say makes sense, we can incorporate their ideas into the finished game. In the case of *Terminal Velocity*, for example, we were inundated with requests for a mouse option. So we put one in, and it turned out to be by far the best way of playing the game. I kept getting thrashed in the network game until I realized that the guys in the other offices were using the mouse."

3D Realms wasn't responsible for developing *Terminal Velocity*, though; that was the work of *Terminal Reality* (which is producing an uncannily similar game for Microsoft as one of the first Windows 95 releases). But with the *Build* engine, created single-handedly by teenage programming genius Ken Silverman, 3D Realms is moving into 3D game development in a big way. Indeed, the company was launched as an off-shoot of Apogee for this very purpose.



Striding around a space station in *Duke Nukem 3D* (above and below left), Duke kicks and shoots his way right through his enemies



Ken Silverman

With the *Build* engine, created by teenage programming genius Ken Silverman, 3D Realms is moving into 3D games in a big way



Duke Nukem 3D is the first — and most talked-about — game to make use of the *Build* engine. It picks up where the platform game *Duke Nukem 2* left off, with Duke returning to Earth to find it occupied by aliens. But it couldn't be a more different game, as George Broussard explains: "The main advantages the *Build* engine has over something like *Doom* are that you can walk over bridges, have true rooms above rooms, swim underwater, have mirrors on the walls, have translucent objects, ride in vehicles like shuttle cars or subways, look up and down, duck, crawl, jump, fly..."

Broussard then proceeds to demonstrate these capabilities on a PC running the game. Duke is standing in an LA street next to a burning police car. A key is pressed and a jetpack launches him high into the air. As the devastation continues in the streets below, he touches down on top of a skyscraper and makes his way to the edge of the roof, from where we can peer down into the streets far below. *Doom* purists claim that there's no need for a look-up-and-down facility, but once you've experienced the vertiginous delights of *Duke Nukem 3D*, you'll think differently.

The company is hugely enthusiastic about *Duke Nukem 3D*, and eager to show off just how much work it has put into making the environment as interactive as possible. The *Build* engine's flexibility means that pretty much anything goes in *Duke Nukem 3D*. In the moonbase, you can fire a rocket through a door and across a room to blow out the window on the other side. The resulting depressurization causes all the aliens in the room to be sucked out — and you too if you don't close the door

in time. You can open cupboards; destroy furniture; use mirrors to look round corners; blow out ventilation panels and then crawl through the ducts behind them; stand on balconies and fire on the aliens below; walk into bars and shoot all the bottles behind them; watch wounded aliens grovel at your feet before kicking them in the head; shrink aliens with a special gun and squash them under your boots; jump aboard a moving underground train and kill aliens as you wind your way through tunnels; run around a full-sized oil tanker, jumping overboard if you want and swimming underneath it...

All this is enhanced by the range of different viewpoints that are offered. "You don't always have to view the action through Duke's eyes," explains Broussard. "You can have him running on the screen in front of you, or you can view him through a series of remote cameras which are well positioned in each room. In fact, in the multiplayer game you can use the cameras in different rooms to spy on your opponents."



Some of the rooms in *Shadow Warrior* are impressively large (above). An oak-paneled room is home to these fellows (below)



With its blood-soaked, atmospheric three-dimensional environment, *Shadow Warrior* owes an obvious debt to the seminal *Doom*



"Shareware works very well for us. We can put out an early beta version of a game and invite people's opinions"

Scott Miller, vice president, 3D Realms

Duke's replay facility is especially flexible and user-friendly. "When you've finished a game you can replay the whole thing, editing the camera angles as you like," says Broussard. "And because there's so much going on the whole time, the result looks more like an 'interactive movie' than anything else I've seen. In fact, perhaps the future of interactive movies lies in games like this, rather than ones which take prerecorded video footage and try to make it interactive."

Nearby, a 3D Realms staff member is drawing rectangles on a grid displayed on his computer screen. "That's the construction tool we use to design *Build* games," explains Broussard. "We've written it ourselves to make the process as simple as possible. And we'll be including it with the game, as we want to encourage players to design their own levels and circulate them freely." Would-be *Doom* designers have no such luxury, having to make do with the data formats supplied by Id.

Being developed alongside *Duke Nukem 3D*, although a little behind it, are a number of other *Build* games. One of these is *Shadow Warrior*, which places you in an ancient Asian fortress populated by shuriken-wielding Ninjas. Rather unfairly, however, you are well-armed with a pair of Uzis against which martial arts seem a little ineffectual.

Then there's *Blood*. "This is a bit more of a gothic horror game that will be very spooky to play," enthuses Broussard. "The evil subconscious thoughts of mankind have taken on material form, and it's your job to run around a castle attacking them with pitchforks and other weird things. What's especially good in *Blood* is the way in which you can combine various objects for attack."

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You can, for example, pick up an aerosol can, which isn't much use on its own, but if you combine it with a cigarette lighter you've got yourself a flamethrower. And there's also a power-up which makes you invincible as long as you continue to kill monsters, so it's imperative for you to dash around in a crazed frenzy to keep the effect going.

The graphics look appropriately dark and moody, with zombies and grim reapers wandering around, and there's an excellently designed fireplace in one room, with the flames blazing in the mouth of a huge skull.

Finally, there's *Ruins*, which is due for completion in the early part of next year. You play a modern-day Indiana Jones-type character who has discovered that the pyramids were built by an alien race, who plan to use the structures as mind-control devices to enslave mankind. It sounds horribly like *Stargate*, but, says Broussard, "You'll actually feel you're in ancient ruins and pyramids, pushing blocks of stone, discovering secret passages and blasting mummies at every turn."

So, what is in store for the future? More *Build*-based games? "Actually, no," says Broussard. "We have an even newer 3D technology which we're using for our next games. Most — if not all — of our future games will feature true 3D movement with six degrees of freedom. You can expect to see some of these in the first part of 1996."

It's a measure of how fast the technology of videogames is moving that even before *Build* is finished, it's already obsolete.

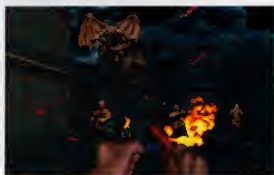


George Broussard, president, 3D Realms



"We have an even newer 3D technology that we're using for our next games. Most — if not all — of our future games will feature true 3D movement with six degrees of freedom"

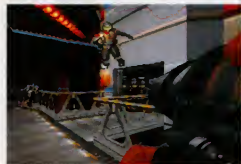
With four games scheduled for release during the next nine months (*Blood*, above), 3D maze addicts are certainly in for a treat



In this scene of *Blood*, an improvised flamethrower is your only form of defense against a variety of bloodthirsty nasties



Impressive parallax effects are achieved in *Duke Nukem 3D* (above). Big power-blasting guns are, of course, an essential element, too (right)



One of the finer qualities of 3D Realms' work is its ability to create amazing, albeit strange, imaginary creatures and structures

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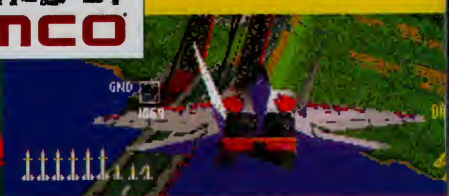
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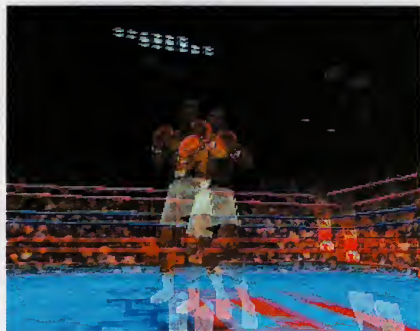
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Foes Of Ali

Format: **3D0 (version shown), PC**
 Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
 Developer: **EA Sports**
 Release Date: **October**
 Origin: **US**



The motion-captured, texture-mapped polygon fighters have all been designed to fight in the style of their real-life counterparts



The excellent blurred vision feature (top). Muhammad Ali himself (middle). An evocative top-down view (above)

EA's first boxing game looks like a distinguished addition to the company's range of top-quality sports sims



A multitude of third-person camera views from around the ring should give *Foes Of Ali* more versatility than any previous boxing simulations

Electronic Arts is one of the few developers to have exploited the potential of the 3D0 — any list of the best games for the machine would have to include *Madden*, *FIFA*, and *Road Rash*. And EA's latest sporting game, *Foes Of Ali*, is a boxing sim which looks even more impressive than PlayStation's *Boxer's Road*.

You can choose to fight as either Muhammad Ali or one of his illustrious opponents. Three modes enable you to fight a single exhibition bout, play through Ali's historic contests, or build a career of your own.

Multiple camera angles provide a televisual feel, but it's the first-person perspective that looks most spectacular. Your gloves swing in from left and right, and as they connect, your foe's face gradually becomes covered in cuts, bruises, and swellings. If his punches land on you, you suffer double vision and literally see red as blood fills your eyes.

The motion-captured, texture-mapped polygon fighters have all been designed to fight in the style of their real-life counterparts — similar to Electro Brain's *Legends Of The Ring* on Super NES and Genesis.

Foes Of Ali looks like yet another polished, playable 3D0 title from EA. It's a shame other developers can't produce games of similar quality on a console that's crying out for them.

ng



In the later rounds of a fight your opponent is a mess of cuts (top) and you're looking through a film of blood (middle). But it's he who ends up on the canvas (above)

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Arc The Lad PlayStation **Virtua Fighter Remixed** Saturn **Wing Commander 3: HOTT** 3DO **Mortal Kombat 3** PC **Dust** Macintosh **Lunar 2** Sega CD **NHL '95** Genesis **Civilization** Super NES **Alpine Racer** Arcade



Terse info-packed reviews of the newest, best and worst videogames

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PlayStation

Mobile Suit Gundam

Publisher: Bandai (Japan)
Developer: Sunrise

It's doubtful that *Mobile Suit Gundam* will ever be the smash hit in America that it is in Japan because of lack of name recognition, but for people looking for a mildly interesting first-person shooter, this one may be the answer. *Gundam* represents a next possible step in the *Doom*-style gaming genre. The perspective is the same, but you're no longer limited to exploring corridors. In *Gundam* the arena is wide open at all times.

The problem with this approach is in creating a landscape that is more than an ultra-simple, texture-mapped wasteland. *Gundam* takes an interesting approach with some levels; while some are in nearly complete darkness, others are underwater, but for the most part, it's full of bleak landscapes. The action of the game is also a little disappointing. There is a nice shielding feature absent from most first-person shooters, but beyond that, expect standard fare.

Rating: ★★



One of the things you'll find missing in *Mobile Suit Gundam* is the long, darkened hallways

Rayman

Publisher: Ubi Soft
Developer: Ubi Soft

It is already obvious that many of the first few 32-bit titles are going to be takeoffs of established 16-bit formulas, and *Rayman* certainly begins deep in this particular hole. The upside is that, with a great deal of thoughtful



The bright colors alone should clue you in to the fact that *Rayman* is a next generation action title. *Rayman*'s overall style is a little on the cute side, but if that doesn't work for you, the great gameplay will make up for it

planning and careful attention to detail, this carry-over manages to raise its head above the crowd.

What separates *Rayman* from its many side-scrolling action brothers is its clever and sophisticated feel. Sure, you're still going to run left to right, collecting blue spheres and jumping over enemies, but you'll also have to climb through maze-like environments, fly through hazardous skies, and swing about from suspended hooks. Of course, none of these things are exactly innovative when considered by themselves, but when combined they add up to a nicely rounded action game with a true feeling of depth and playability.

Rayman is a success in the end, not because of any new gimmick or notable innovation, but rather because everything in this game, ranging from graphics to sound, is done extremely well.

Rating: ★★★★★

Total Eclipse Turbo

Publisher: Crystal Dynamics
Developer: Crystal Dynamics

Making its debut on the 3DO, *Total Eclipse Turbo* is a gussied-up version of the original 3D space shooter which helped people to believe that shooters didn't have to go left to right or bottom to top. While the original title was an easy

way to impress 16-bit console owners, it's doubtful *Total Eclipse Turbo* will carry the same weight in this age of 32-bit monsters.

It's not that it doesn't look good because with its texture mapping and realistic effects, it does, but there is still something missing in the overall look that screams for 32-bit power. There is also something missing in the play control which is unforgiving and awkward at times.

Total Eclipse Turbo comes close to hitting the high-water mark, but for the most part it's not much to get excited about. Perhaps this genre still needs some time to grow as it develops on the new platforms.

Rating: ★★



Total Eclipse Turbo takes an early stab at the 3D space shooter but comes up a little short

As usual, *finals* brings you expert opinions on the latest games. New Saturn and PlayStation titles are beginning to boast what the systems can do, while surprise hits keep emerging for 16-bit systems. Below is a handy guide to help you determine how much our reviewers liked a game.

★★★★★ **Revolutionary**
Brilliantly conceived and flawlessly executed; a new high-water mark.

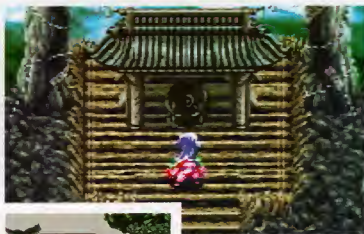
★★★★ **Excellent**
A high-quality and inventive new game. Either a step forward for an existing genre, or a successful attempt at creating a new one.

★★★ **Good**
A solid and competitive example of an established game style.

★★ **Average**
Perhaps competent; certainly uninspired.

★ **Bad**
Crucially flawed in design or application.

PlayStation



One small step for our hero in *Arc The Lad*, one giant leap for RPGs. Of course, when this title reaches the States, it will read in English (left)

SWINGING

Arc The Lad

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer: Q Craft

With all the great 16-bit RPGs of the past few years, it was only a matter of time before 32-bit role-playing games started to pileup. So, what is a 32-bit RPG like? Well, if the answer can be found in a title like *Arc The Lad*, then the answer is exquisite. Whether the deeply-involved storyline will be enough to keep you satisfied almost becomes a secondary concern when witnessing the gorgeous graphics and unbelievable attention to detail throughout this title.

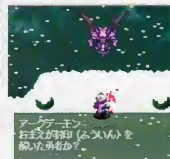
Perhaps the most impressive aspect of *Arc The Lad* is the grand soundtrack which rivals any big-budget Hollywood production. There is a definite gameplay formula being followed here which is the only disappointing aspect you're likely to find, but then again, it's likely that any change in gameplay would have just ended up seeming forced. In the end, *Arc The Lad* gives you the feeling of being involved in something important.

What else could you ask for?

Rating: ★★★★★



Relying on traditional elements of gameplay, *Arc The Lad* follows the lead of titles such as *Shining Force*



Saturn

Shin Shinobi Den

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega of Japan

When considering the big software names of the past few years, certainly names like *Sonic*, *Mario*, and *Mega Man* come to mind. Just beyond these titles in notoriety is the name of *Shinobi*. Beginning on the NES, the *Shinobi* series has maintained a loyal following from the beginning. The latest installment has recently shown up on the Sega Saturn.



Shin Shinobi Den mixes motion-captured characters and animation with familiar gameplay

Shin Shinobi Den is the first 32-bit version of this classic run-and-slash-style martial arts adventure. What the Saturn version offers that none have before is little more than a new level of graphic sophistication, but for fans of the series, this may be enough. The look is beautiful from start to finish, and the action is no less interesting or challenging than the early titles. Of course, it might have been nice to see some innovations in gameplay, but then again, if something's not broken...

Rating: ★★★



Another attractive shot from *Shin Shinobi Den*; it won't take long to recognize this as another in the series, but fans will be appreciative

Virtual Hydlide

Publisher: Atlus
Developer: T & E Soft

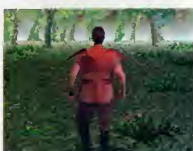
It shouldn't be any surprise that a few successful 16-bit games will show up again in revamped fashion during these early days of 32-bit gaming. A good example is *Virtual Hydlide*, an RPG and action title that made its name in the early days of the 16-bit systems.

There should be no surprise that developers are going to take advantage of new tools and systems like Saturn to make something visually stunning. *Virtual Hydlide*, with its behind-the-back viewpoint and full 3D environment, is such a title.

However, was it worth changing the format of the original game just to make something with a little bit of "wow" value? Unfortunately, the answer is no. The new format may be good looking, but it makes gameplay awkward and more-or-less tedious, taking away from any enjoyment which might come from a more involved RPG plot.

Perhaps, in the future, developers will stay away from the gimmicks and concentrate more on actual gaming substance.

Rating: ★★



Virtual Hydlide's behind-the-back perspective is great for visual shock value, but little else

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Saturn

REASSURING



Even when characters Kage and Geoffrey are doing nothing more than lying about, it is difficult to deny their striking good looks

Virtua Fighter Remix

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega

When a new hardware system hits the market there is always a bit of flashy software created to grab everyone's attention. Does anyone remember *Actraiser* for the Super NES, or *Sewer Shark* for the Sega CD? While these games perform a valuable service, the first few games for a new system are, in the long run, not going to be terribly impressive because of the developer's inexperience with that system. A perfect example of this phenomenon is *Virtua Fighter* for the Sega Saturn. At first glance the game looks good, and it certainly plays well, but the truth is that the game is full of glitches and sub-par performance standards. Enter *Virtua Fighter Remix*.

Perhaps never in videogame history has a problem such as *Virtua Fighter* been so quickly and thoroughly corrected.



The impressive and fluid motion of VF Remix is most evident in the many throw moves (top right and right)



Virtua Fighter Remix contains all the great gameplay of the original without any of the weak spots. In fact, the game has been redefined far beyond the standards of the original arcade version. With an increased polygon count and sophisticated shading techniques, *Virtua Fighter* can now trade blows with the likes of *Tekken* and yes, even *Battle Arena Toshinden*, although the fighting styles are still vastly different.

But now, the question is how will Sega go about distributing *Remix*? Surely any of the early Saturn owners are going to get an empty feeling in their gut playing the original title just knowing that *Virtua Fighter Remix* is out there. Hopefully Sega will do the right thing, in whatever form that might take.

Rating: ★★★★★

The fast-paced action in *Virtua Fighter Remix* is surpassed only by the variety of attacks (left)

rating 3DO jaguar

3DO

GREAT

Wing Commander III: Heart of the Tiger

Publisher:
Origin
Developer:
Origin

The premiere space combat sim for PC arrives on 3DO, and it's everything you could have hoped for. Origin pulled out all the stops when it put this one together. Gone are the animated plots of *WC1* and *II*. Instead, Origin brought in real star power:

Mark Hamill, John Rhys-Davies, and Malcolm MacDowell top the list of recognizable actors and all make a big difference in realism, emotional delivery, and suspense. What's more, your decisions during the story sequences can have a major impact on what missions you fly and how well your wingmen perform. But what sets the game apart is it uses FMV to enhance an incredible game, rather than substitute for it.

The heart of the *Wing Commander* series has always been the space combat, and this one kicks. While the PC version made the leap from bit-mapped sprite ships to texture-mapped 3D models, the 3DO seems to use almost the same engine as last year's *Super Wing Commander*. However, as that game was by far the best version of *Wing Commander* for a console system, putting the 3DO's polygon engine to good use, there's very little lost in the translation.

Flight is noticeably less smooth, and also seems less challenging somehow than the PC version, but it still flies extremely well. If you can't afford to play *WCIII* on a 100 MHz



Pentium with CD-ROM, this makes a more than acceptable alternative, and is the best 3DO game of the year.

Rating:
★★★★★

Do you like to fly around the galaxy and blow stuff up? Then you won't be disappointed



Familiar actors like Mark Hamill (top) help make *WCIII*'s FMV scenes a joy to watch, rather than the painful experience we've come to expect

Jaguar

Power Drive Rally

Publisher: Time Warner
Developer: Rage

The overhead racing game has not been seen much action since the early days of arcade racers. And while *Power Drive Rally* is a first-class version of this style, displaying a few polished graphics, the title really doesn't do much to take us out of the past.

There is a nice variety of tracks, weather conditions, and cars to choose from, but these are all elements that are more or less expected at this point. If there had been a few more innovations like the Skill Test levels which are great fun, then perhaps there would be more to say about this one. On the other hand, if you're feeling nostalgic for the good old-fashioned overhead racer, this is a good one to check out.

Rating: ★★★



If you just can't get enough overhead racing action, *Power Drive Rally* delivers

Ultra Vortek

Publisher: Atari
Developer: Beyond Games

If you've been missing the 2D fighting action of games like *Mortal Kombat* on your Jaguar, then you need wait no longer. *Ultra*

Vortek is undeniably a *Mortal Kombat* "klone," but unlike most look-alikes, this title is dangerously close to being as good as any of the *Mortal Kombat* games.

Ultra Vortek scores most of its points in graphics which are every bit as sharp, gruesome, and gothic as you've seen in other 2D fighters. There is also a good bit of gore for the blood-thirsty players out there, giving it a certain edge that many fighters are still missing. Unfortunately, *Ultra Vortek* suffers from slower gameplay than you'd hoped to have, clocking in at about two-thirds of the speed.

Though this game is unoriginal and suffers from slow control, you forgive *Ultra Vortek* because of the overall good job (graphics, tone, and gore) Beyond Games has done with the borrowed concept.

Rating: ★★★

White Men Can't Jump

Publisher: Trimark
Developer: High Voltage Software

In an effort to compete with arcade-style titles such as *NBA Jam*, the Jaguar now has *White Men Can't Jump*. With the aid of the four-player multitap, this two-on-two basketball game is strongest in the multiplayer category; and with its general leniency toward violence (shoving, punches, elbows), the action is sure to lead to many heated competitions.

With swooping camera angles, scaling players, and running street-style commentary, there's a lot to keep up with, and everything is handled well enough to do so. Occasional problems with the erratic camera movement make the game, at times, unsuccessful at capturing an appropriate angle.

To really get the most out of this title, you'll need to get some friends in on the action.

Rating: ★★★



With nearly everything about *Ultra Vortek* borrowed from the *Mortal Kombat* series, it is undoubtedly doomed to a lifetime of comparisons

id



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end of the
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too pretty a
picture.



HEXEN

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BEYOND
HERE

rating 32X neo-geo pc

32X

Pitfall: The Mayan Adventures**Publisher:** Activision
Developer: Activision

The classic Atari 2600 title is back for another system. Last year the Super NES, Genesis, and Sega CD versions all brought Pitfall Harry to the 16-bit level. And now the 32X version has arrived, with a nearly identical game.

You are the original Pitfall Harry's son and you must save your 8-bit dad from the evil Mayan spirits. The levels include bungee jumping on rubber plants, bouncing off tongues in a wall, and, of course, escaping the chomping alligators. In a secret area of the game you can actually play the original Pitfall. The 32X version plays a touch faster and sounds a bit better than the other versions, but unless you're taking notes, you wouldn't notice the difference.

Pitfall is a solid game with great animation and an ambient

soundtrack, but it's far too short and contrived to be anything more than an average one.
Rating: ★★★

Neo-Geo

Aggressors of Dark Kombat CD**Publisher:** SNK
Developer: ADK

Here we go again. Though they claim this title to actually be a 3D fighter, *Aggressors of Dark Kombat*, Neo-Geo's latest fighter, is every bit as indistinguishable as the last



Aggressors of Dark Kombat — another in a long, long line of familiar Neo-Geo fighters

several 2D fighters. What apparently makes this one 3D is a tiny bit of depth in the playing field enabling your fighter to step in and out of the direct line of fire.

From graphics to moves to sound effects, almost every element in this game is more-or-less average and is not likely to stand out from the enormous 2D fighting library of Neo-Geo. While the added depth is a nicely added twist to an old formula, this minor change simply doesn't end up making much difference.
Rating: ★★

Kabuki Klash**Publisher:** SNK
Developer: Hudson Soft

What can we say? Neo-Geo has yet another 2D fighter for you, and well, it's just about as good as any of the rest of them.

This one is a little more cartoonlike and cute than most, but overall there's not much to separate this title from the countless other two-dimensional fighting games previously released for Neo-Geo systems.

If anything was to separate this one from the masses, it would have to be the feature enabling you to collect bonuses (including anything from extra points to extra magic) during a fight in which birds fly overhead. And now for the standard Neo-Geo fighting game review ending: if you just can't get enough of that 2D fighting action, here's yet another one for you.
Rating: ★★

PC

Balor of the Evil Eye**Publisher:** Koel
Developer: Koel

Bearing that characteristic Koel flavor, *Balor of the Evil Eye* is well built, historically accurate, grand in scale, and a horribly, horribly complex strategy game.

Players take on the role of a Celtic chieftain, looking to unite the people of Eire through warfare and economic strategy, and to then remove Balor, the local warlord, from power with your combined forces. In order to



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accomplish this task, the chieftain must gather heroes from around the land and send them to conquer neighboring kingdoms, while leaving enough populous working in the fields to keep everyone fed. Other headaches will include the production of weaponry for your armies, paying tribute to the enemy, and managing multiple kingdoms. The game is huge, and even the most skilled gamer can expect to spend hours at his or her computer completely engrossed.

As well made as it is though, *Balor* is not for everyone. The game's intense complexity of play will make it inaccessible for all but the most devoted and persistent of strategy gurus. If you're the kind of player who likes to rip into a game without the instruction manual, this game will leave you completely cold.

Rating: ★★★

Hi-Octane

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Developer: Bullfrog

Are futuristic racers going to be the fighting games of the late '90s? If so, Bullfrog is certainly hoping for *Street Fighter II* status. This basic concept is becoming rapidly familiar. You race in a hover car-like car, you shoot other vehicles, you try to win.



The most impressive part of *High Octane's* engine is its ability to deliver a true feeling of speed



Seated in one of 14 massive 'mechs, you'll play against the computer in sheer destruction. Activision promises an add-on for multiplayer soon

Along the way, you'll encounter all the texture-mapped polygons and Gouraud shading you expected — lots. The game gives a great feeling of fast motion and is extremely fun to play, but with only six tracks to choose from, it's way too short. Still, the ride, while it lasts, is intense.

Rating: ★★★★★

Interactive Fiction Collections

Publisher: Activision

Developer: Infocom

Remember the classic Infocom text adventures of the '80s? Simply put, these are some of the greatest adventure games of all time.

Designers Dave Lebling, Steve Meretzky, and Marc Blank took interactive fiction to levels yet to be duplicated (although the Mac game *Dust* comes close).

Now, Activision has again released the games in a series of five collections, Fantasy, Mystery, Adventure, Sci-Fi, and Comedy. Each has four to six games and two bonuses, *Planetfall* and a *Zork* instalment. If you buy all these packages, you can get every Infocom game you would ever want to play, and the complete *Zork* series. We're talking hundreds of hours of playing time here, in all sorts of styles. From the lost building terror of *The Lurking Horror* (on the Mystery Collection) to the surreal wordplay of *Nord and Bert* (Comedy Collection), we can't recommend just one title — if you want to have anything approaching a complete game library, you'll need to grab all of these.

Rating: ★★★★★

Mechwarrior 2

Publisher: Activision

Developer: Activision

After one of the longest delays in videogame history, a complete change of staff and design theory

PC

BLOODY

Mortal Kombat 3

Publisher: Williams

Developer: Sculptured

As every new game manufacturer struggles to create a fighting title for the PC by adding 3D effects (*FX Fighter*), high-res graphics (*Savage Warriors*), and gimmicks by the score (*Brutal* and *One Must Fall*), the translation gurus at Sculptured Software stepped in and converted Williams' 2D money-maker into the only worthy rival to *FX Fighter*.

As in the original, players can choose between 15 different characters, each armed with several deadly special moves, fatalities, babilities, and animalities. Die-hard *Mortal Kombat* fans will probably be disappointed to find that many of their favorite characters from *Mortal Kombat 1 & 2* (*Baraka*, *Raiden*, and *Kitana* to name a few) have been replaced by newer characters that don't show the same appeal and strength of design as their predecessors.

Sculptured has gone to great lengths to ensure that the PC version matches the original as close as possible, including the seven levels of scrolling backgrounds and AI routines that run at the same speed as the arcade. Not satisfied with merely producing a carbon-copy though, the folks at Sculptured have also added a few new features that offer new challenges and surprises to fans, like head-to-head modem play, a round-robin network tournament, and the ability (with a secret code) to play as any of the boss characters.

While *Mortal Kombat 3* may have been a disappointment in the arcades to some folks, this version of the game is one of the best fighting titles ever released for the PC. If you like fighting games, this is a title you must own.

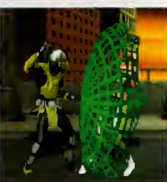
Rating: ★★★★★



The new version's audio is improved, and Liu King has never been so annoying



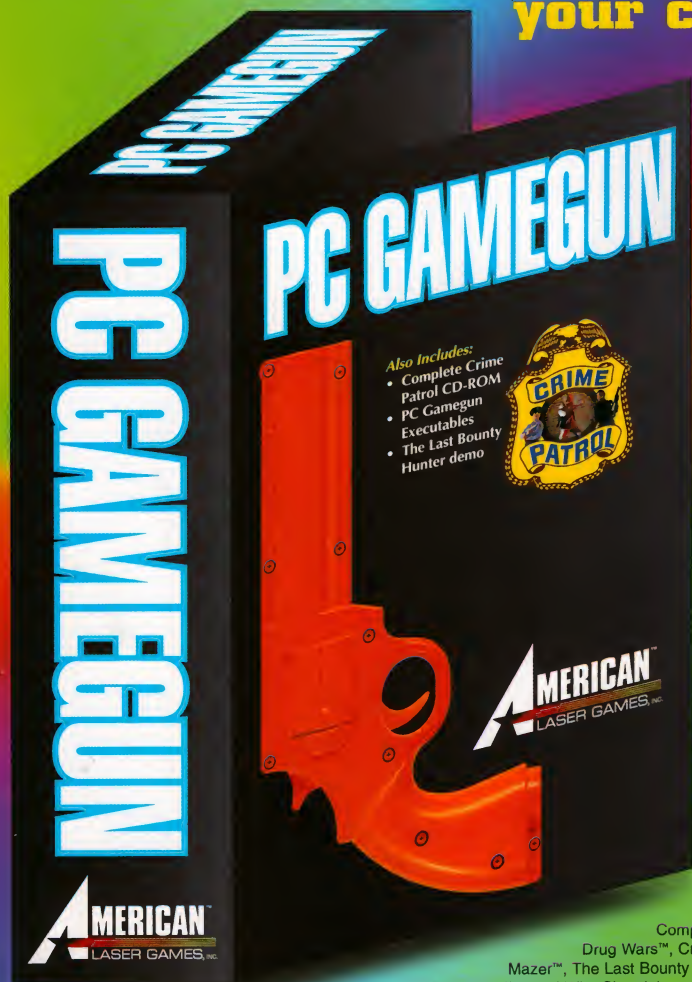
Smoke, pulled from secret levels of *MK2*, has turned into an intriguing new combatant (top). Cyrax is an effective but sterile player to master (right)



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Swinging around the jungle is actually fun in *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure*

In the middle of the development cycle, Activision has finally, finally released *MechWarrior 2*. And the funny thing is, despite all of the trouble getting it out the door, the game is really good.

Like the original *MechWarrior*, players get a chance to sit behind the controls of a giant robot belonging to the warrior clans of Jade Falcon or Wolf. After proving their skill in the training grounds, neophyte warriors will move into beautifully rendered battlefields to face off against enemy mechs controlled by vicious AI routines that take advantage of every weapon at their disposal (including heavy and light lasers, missiles, and even jump jets).

The 14 different 'mech types, along with game objects like bases, buildings, and hills are all superbly rendered, and can be viewed in 320x200, 640x480, or 1024x768 resolutions (although the latter takes one whopper of a machine to play at full speed). Sadly, no multiplayer option was included in this initial version of the game, but Activision has promised to deliver an add-on disk which will enable network play later this month. With its 3D terrain, attention to game-world detail, and fantastic special effects, *MechWarrior 2* stands as the best 'mech simulator currently available.

Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure

Developer: Activision
Publisher: Activision

The real question with this isn't how good the game itself is — you've seen enough reviews to know that it's a somewhat hit-and-miss side-scroller that has some cool features — the question is how good is the translation to Windows 95? It's excellent.

Pitfall starts and runs extremely easily, and it looks good,

too. It's a little slower than the Genesis version, and the higher resolution computer monitor means the title looks a little pixelly at 640x480, but if you're dying to play this, and you haven't got a console system, you won't be disappointed in the conversion.

Rating: ★★★

Powerhouse

Developer: Impressions
Publisher: Impressions

If Maxis can make a half-game *SimElevator* (aka *SimTower*), Impressions can do a power utility simulation. What's more, the company can do it right.



You must use thrift and guile to beat out your competitor in *Powerhouse*, a utility sim

As the head of a power utility, you've got to develop an electrical infrastructure for a given region before your competitors can. Do you go for clean or dirty power? Do you hire an R&D team or do you bribe government officials? And how do you keep the cash flowing in while developing that expensive off-shore rig?

Looking at the mind boggling array of charts and graphs in the game will provide some answers, but when all is said and done, making those decisions is up to you, and that's where the real fun in this economic simulation lies.

Rating: ★★★

Space Quest 6

Developer: Sierra
Publisher: Sierra

If you've played one of the earlier installments, you've played *Space Quest 6*. The only thing different are the puzzles Roger Wilco faces.

In this installment of *Quest*, you take a "fantastic voyage" into the bloodstream of your crew mate, Steller Santiago. The standard (groan) Sierra humor is here, as are the challenging puzzles. You know the drill. If you liked the first five, you'll want this. If not, you probably aren't even reading this review.

Rating: ★★★



This traditional cantina scene in *Space Quest 6* makes for plenty of *Star Wars* good-natured jokes

World Hockey 95

Publisher: Merit
Developer: Merit

What do you get when you combine so-so graphics, bad FMV commentary, and easy to beat opponents? *World Hockey 95*.

On yeah, and the three-quarters playfield view, while novel, makes it easy to lose your puck, or your currently selected player, especially when you are on the near side of the rink. Although not terrible, the control of the game is not exactly going to send the

sports staff at Electronic Arts running in fear, either.

Still, this game deserves some credit for being the only PC product around that lets you play hockey on the international level. So, if you are absolutely dying for the ability to play hockey on your PC, and you want a rematch of Team USA vs. Canada, this will suffice ... barely.

Rating: ★

Macintosh

Buried in Time: The Journeyman Project 2

Publisher: Sanctuary Woods
Developer: Presto Studios

Despite the new bells and whistles (and temporal distortion matrices and cloaking devices), fans of the original *Journeyman Project* won't have any trouble getting into this hipper, vastly larger sequel.

A three-CD-ROM set — if the game weren't so cool, this would be starting to get silly — *Buried in Time's* bizarre opening sequence has the player visited by a panicked future self (!) handing off a portable temporal jump suit before being carted off by his fellow Time Officers. The story picks up with the player framed (in



With overwhelming scenes like this (above), *The Journeyman Project 2* is a real visual treat. The chip-based control scheme is still repetitive and distracting but that's more the fault of current CD tech than the game

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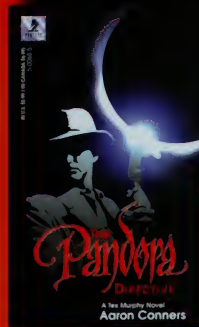
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Macintosh

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They tell me you're the toughest rancher in town.

Which way to the bar?

Good-night

Dust: A Tale of the Wired West

Publisher: CyberFlix
Developer: CyberFlix

Dust presents us with several refreshing qualities: it's one of the first interactive Westerns (following *Alone in the Dark 3*); it's the first game created with CyberFlix's proprietary *DreamFactory* authoring tool;

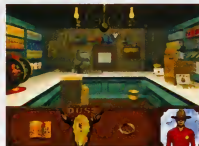
and most importantly, it's one of the few recent adventure games that's fun to play, with the possible exception of *Full Throttle*.

The game, set in 1882, casts you in the role of a Sergio Leone-style nameless "stranger," who comes to the dying town of Diamondback, New Mexico Territory, with no gun, no memory, and only \$5 in your pocket. In four days, you've got to restore law and order to the town, solve a mystery involving a priceless Native American artifact, and most importantly, stay alive.

The town is a fully navigable rendered 3D environment, with more than 35 interactive characters. The characters also interact with each other. In realtime, so something you say to one person can easily affect your later interactions with another. The 5,000-plus spoken lines of dialogue in the game precluded using video; instead, only the mouths of characters are animated. The effect is hokey, but it enables CyberFlix to include double or triple the gameplay than



The graphics are a little dark, as in this church, but they are rendered very well



Communication with characters actually works surprisingly well; Find clues from this rancher (top). The interface is very Mac-like, easy to use, and intuitive (above)

many three- and four-CDs opuses do.

Dust fulfills all the requirements for a successful adventure: largely nonlinear, multiple solutions to problems, multiple story endings, no hand holding (yes, you can die), and a strong but not constricting plotline. Yee-Haw! Rating: ★★★★★

a queerly OJ-style scenario) for altering history. The only way to clear your good name is to once again muck about in time, both past and future. The biggest new gizmo in the new *Journeyman* is "Arthur," a neural-net artificial intelligence chip which acts as gameplay advisor, educational commentator (this is the only game we've seen in years that's managed to slip in a little historical by-the-way without actively annoying us), and wisecracking side-kick.

This is an awesome experience in the overwhelming sense of the word, whose completion feels a little like finishing a long novel that actually makes you think. (Now, if only those temporal jumpsuits didn't look like Lumpo the Clown.)

Rating: ★★

Paparazzi: Tales of Tinseltown CD

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Activision

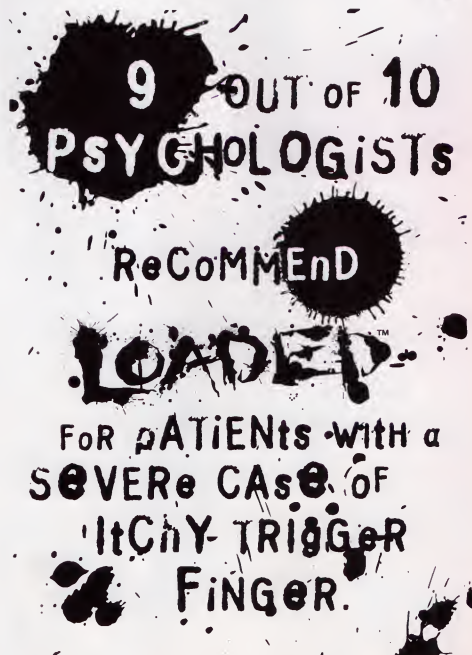
Groan. Just in case the title doesn't tell all, the monthly What-Were-You-Thinking Award lands

squarely on this double-CD set.

Another branching movie product cobbled together under a minute-rice interface, *Paparazzi* puts the player in the shoes of a free-lance photographer trying to make it big in the sleazy, backstabbing world of tabloid photojournalism. That's right, the gameplay here revolves around taking compromising photos of thinly-veiled Hollywood personalities (pop queen The Virgin Mary, right-wing hornblower Rusk Limburger) and then selling said snaps for publication (or blackmail). Track down the celebs, take pics at the worst possible moment, and run like hell, especially if you're photographing Shawn Pendleton. And there's a really ghastly microcosm here: Much of the player's game-scale day is spent fielding phone tip-offs and watching six channels of bad TV (presumably in some fleabag motel) for clues.

For computer first-timers—your parents, say—*Paparazzi* offers something flashy and mildly amusing to showcase their new CD drive; for gamers, it offers a pair of attractive mirrored coasters.

Rating: ★



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Sega CD

STRAIGHT

Lunar 2:
Eternal Blue

Publisher: Working Designs
Developer: Working Designs/Game Arts/Studio Alex

The original *Lunar* was a simple, guilty pleasure. While the game's structure was standard RPG fare, it was packed with so much off-the-wall — and occasionally off-color — humor, both intentional and unintentional, that you wound up enjoying it in spite of yourself. Working Designs has since carved a niche for itself by importing fairly standard RPGs and adding enough goofiness to make them worth playing.

Lunar 2: Eternal Blue is both more and less of the same. When looked at purely as an RPG, it's definitely a step up from the original *Lunar*. The graphics are noticeably better, the music is excellent, the cut scenes have actual animation this time around, and the adventure is just short of huge. However, while the game packs in plenty of humorous asides (including riffs on Fabio, *The Fugitive*, and other up-to-the-minute cultural references), the tone is decidedly less goofy, with more of an emphasis on drama and storyline. While normally this would



While much of the humor of the original has been preserved (top), there's less of it this time around (above). This is a worthy sequel in all respects, but at what cost?

count as an improvement, there's no real analog to the original *Lunar*'s magicians who were obsessed with foot hygiene, or a town full of inbred hicks. There's still plenty to chuckle at, and overall it's a much stronger game, but you can't help feeling something's missing.

Rating: ****



Lunar 2's opening sequence, in fact, nearly all the animated cut scenes, are very nicely done

Genesis

Primal Rage

Publisher: Time Warner Interactive
Developer: Probe Interactive

In the arcades, *Primal Rage* gained popularity because of the sharp graphics, crisp sound, bloody attacks, and brawling dinosaurs. Could the home version match that? In two words, "no way."

The downgrade in graphic clarity is, of course, to be expected from arcade to home console, but the characters in *Primal Rage* have that flat, fuzzy, pasted-on-the-screen look that just isn't acceptable anymore. On the other hand, there is an impressive list of attacks, including the bloody, tasteless, and disturbing moves that made the original so popular.

Without the graphics and sound, however, *Primal Rage* isn't much of a game. The actual play mechanics never have been on par with the great fighting



Primal Rage's arcade graphics all appear on the Genesis, but in the translation, some quality is lost

games, and the home version has done nothing to change that.

Rating: **

The Ooze

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega Technical Institute

The Sega Technical Institute is becoming a larger force in Sega's US development effort and, between this game and *Comix Zone*, the company is making some very different games.

In *The Ooze* you are an amoeba-like blob whose attacks

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Sega Genesis

SLAPSHOT

NHL '96

Publisher: EA

Developer: High Score

NHL '95 on the Genesis was arguably the best sports simulation product ever. Instead of messing with near perfection, EA added new features and changed the look a bit, and the superb gameplay of the '95 version has only improved. The additions are subtle and effective: players have a new sharper look and are starting to resemble humans, as opposed to blocks of pixel; sound was enhanced with more effects like the slamming door of the penalty box; and the computer opponent is a bit tougher, so that winning every game isn't as easy as it used to be. There are now three difficulty levels to choose from, although only the toughest is of any challenge to vets; goalies are tougher to score on; and new moves and more ways to score include one-time touch passes and a "Spin-O-Rama," adding to the strategy. Finally, the updated rosters, season stats, trades, the ability to create players, and four-player play are all here as well, making NHL '96 the new benchmark for hockey games.

Conspicuous by their absence from the EA hockey series since '93, the enforcers (big guys who love to fight) have now returned to center ice. The fights have never been an integral part of gameplay, but they're a nice break in the action. But EA has even managed to work the fights into the gameplay: When two players square off, the fight doesn't start until the gloves drop. If your top scorer is locked up with a big goon, you can hold onto your gloves and let the other guy pummel you until he receives an extra penalty for instigating.

The only thing possibly wrong with this game is that every other sports game in your library may pale in comparison.

Rating: ★★★★★



Drop your gloves and start punching, the fight is back (top). Now humiliate your opponent by leaving him on the ice with his jersey over his head (right). This title features the same great gameplay as in the '95 version



Once you defeat an enemy in *The Ooze*, you suck him up into your bobby pseudopod and grow

include spitting and extending your pseudopods out at enemies. Once the enemies are killed you suck them into your mass and grow. This odd premise actually creates for some very different gameplay. In the case of *The Ooze*, however, different doesn't mean better. After the originality wears off, the game becomes quite blah. The spitting and toilet flushing sound effects are effective, and the music is good until you realize it's the same song over and over again.

The Ooze may not be the best game around, but its attempt at a

different angle should be commended.

Rating: ★★★

Weaponlord

Publisher: Namco

Developer: Visual Concepts

From the beginning, the creators of *Weaponlord* set out to offer more than most gamers expect from a 2D fighter. Each character carries a mighty impressive form of sharpened steel. And for the first time ever, weapons can be used for thrust blocks (a block



Weaponlord's barbaric characters are typified by chiseled bodies and the heavy metal they carry



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Super NES

SOPHISTICATED



This is hard-core strategy at its finest. *Civilization* is a classic that every gamer should make part of their permanent collection...

Civilization

Publisher: Koei

Developer: Microprose

Finally, One of the classic strategy games of all time arrives for a console system, and it's both worth the wait and a mild disappointment.

First the bad news: the menu system is cumbersome, with "City" and "Production" windows located on separate screens, for example, and the button configuration could have been more intuitive. Worst of all though, it's just plain ugly to look at. Granted, the Super NES doesn't have nearly the resolution of the VGA screens this was originally designed for, but the whole game has a compromised, rushed appearance that's likely to put off *Civilization* devotees and scare away newcomers, and this is the only reason it doesn't rate a star higher.

However, as far as game play and strategy go, it's complete and wonderful. Simply put, if you've never taken a crack at this game before, be prepared to lose hours, even days, trying to conquer those pesky Babylonians. It has lost none of its complexity or addictiveness in the translation, and every option, including custom worlds and all difficulty levels, has been preserved. It's one of the best of its kind, and if you don't own it, go out and buy it.

Rating: ★★★



... but the Super NES version could be easier on the eyes



specifically designed for a counter-attack), actual parry moves, and weapon-breaking moves. At first play, none of this is evident, however, once the game is mastered, the deep strategies come into play.

Other than the advanced weapon play there's not much that separates *Weaponlord* from the glut of 2D fighters already out. There's the usual collection of special moves, blood, finishing moves, and everything else that is expected in a fighter. The graphics are nice, but the choppy animation makes it difficult to master the complex strategies.

Weaponlord is easily one of the better 16-bit fighters available

and is certainly worthy of at least a good long look.

Rating: ★★★★★

Super NES

Castlevania: Dracula X

Publisher: Konami

Developer: Konami

Don't everyone jump just yet.

This isn't exactly a "new" *Castlevania* game. Actually, this is a port of the PC Engine title *Dracula X*, making it more than two years old, and it shows. There are colorful but flat backgrounds, enemies you've



If you're desperate for a game with exploding skeletons, you might — might — like *Dracula X*

seen before, and nonconfigurable, picky controls combine to try the patience of even the most ardent Belmont-clan devotees.

Konami, a company generally reliable for at least interesting fare, must simply be hoping to make a quick buck in an otherwise dry Super NES season. There's eight levels of no-frills side-scrolling action here, without an original or interesting thought in its wolfbane-stuffed head. Whip fetishists might get a kick out of it, but everyone else should simply steer clear.

Rating: ★

Doom

Publisher: Williams

Developer: Entertainment

Developer: Sculptured Software

First of all, this is much better than *Wolfenstein 3-D*, the last Id title

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rating arcade

adapted for Super NES, but given that *Wolfenstein* was a complete disaster, that doesn't say much. In *Doom*, control is poor and sluggish. The bitmaps are so blocky that enemies from the mid-distance and beyond blend in with the background, and overall, the constant squinting at the screen will make your eyes hurt — literally.

From a technical standpoint it's impressive that Sculptured was able to port this at all — it's still recognizably *Doom*, and good for a thrill. It's also worth pointing out that the game is remarkably complete, with more levels than the 32X version, but the results make you wonder if they should have bothered in the first place.

Rating: ★★



If you squint your eyes hard enough, you might think you're actually playing *Doom*

Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story

Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Virgin Interactive

Originally, this was supposed to be released by Virgin more than a year and a half ago, instead it was shelved. A version was put out for Jaguar, and it should be duly noted that the Super NES version plays much better. That still doesn't make it any good.

For the record, this is the only fighting game we've ever come across that not only has no special moves to speak of, but also

enables you play as only one (count it, one) character, namely Bruce Lee, even in VS mode. Add to this a fighting system which strives for "realism" but only serves to frustrate and piss off the most dedicated fighting fan, and you've got the worst of the worst. Stick to posing in front of your *Fists of Fury* poster — it's a lot more interactive and satisfying.

Rating: ★

Heads On Soccer

Publisher: US Gold
Developer: US Gold

Well, it ain't FIFA, but then what is? Jettisoning sport-sim accuracy for ease of play and "jump in and kick" action, *Heads On* can make for a fun afternoon — especially with the use of a four-player multitap, which is supported. Each team has its roster of special players, with names like Striker, who are tougher, faster, or just plain meaner than the rest, adding an interesting dash of strategy not usually found in a soccer game, which turns this into a less bloody cousin of sport spoofs like *Mutant League Football*.

The field view could be more helpful, and it's not likely to interest anyone in this year's World Cup, but if you let your brain rest a little, it's enjoyable enough.

Rating: ★★★



If you're not looking for a soccer sim, then *Heads On Soccer*, an action-based title, ain't too bad



If you ever wanted to be Bruce Lee, here's your chance — the Dragon must be pinwheeling in his grave

Kawasaki Super Bike Challenge

Publisher: Time Warner
Developer: Domark

We always thought that a racing game should include a feeling of speed — apparently the developers of Kawasaki think otherwise.

This title is the pits. You've got plenty of options for modifying your bike, and some 20 different circuits to race on, including the "Suzuka Eight Hour" endurance race. But every single track leaves you with the impression that you're racing through molasses on a tricycle. Flat-shaded "polygon" blocks dot



Kawasaki Super Bike Challenge provides options for modifying your bike, and lots of courses

the sides of the road, which only serves to confuse rather than decorate, the "first-person" perspective rather effectively hides the road, and you could even describe the control as sluggish, except that sluggish isn't strong enough a word. Ick.

Rating: ★

Urban Strike

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Black Pearl Software

With this title, the *Strike* series for Super NES is complete. As with the release of *Jungle Strike* for Super NES some sixth months ago, *Urban Strike* is more colorful, but mildly inferior to its Genesis counterpart. Neither the game's control nor animation are as smooth, but this is a quibble. The real appeal of these games has always been the mix of strategy and mass destruction, and it delivers, packing in all 16 levels, including a few missions on



Missing a few animation frames, Super NES' *Urban Strike* arrives with most of its gameplay intact

foot. It also nearly deserves an extra star for a glib appearance by the healing spirit of Elvis. We do wish the series would go in a new direction — after three installments, you know what to expect — but if you want more, here it is.

Rating: ★★

Wayne Gretsky and the NHLPA All-Stars

Publisher: Time Warner
Developer: Time Warner

With the success of *NBA Jam*, sport game-slash-action hybrids are popping up all over the place, and here's another one.

While there are "arcade" and "simulation" modes, this is anything but a true sim. Players don't just check each other, they make these odd twirls to knock the puck loose. As hockey games go, it may not be in the same league as *NHL '96*, but it ain't bad. With options for exhibition, tournament/season play, and practice modes — including a practice fight mode — and even settings to turn skate momentum on and off, it's pretty complete, but this one is nothing special.

Rating: ★★★



He may be the Great One, but NHLPA All-Stars is a So-So one

Arcade

Cool Riders

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega

For a touch of Salvador Dali in your gameplaying, sit down for a play at *Cool Riders*, Sega's absurd new chopper racer. Reminiscent of *Out Run*, *Cool Riders* captures the long-distance branch-style race in its most distractible, random manner — crazy creatures attempt to block your path, you crash into a canyon wall only to bounce back unscathed, and when you drive off into Niagara Falls, you somehow appear on the same race track utterly unharmed.

Realism is ridiculously absent, a sense of speed is almost nil, and control is plain sloppy; you practically have three directions, straight, and a left and right turn at 45 degrees. With games like *Cyber*

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rating arcade



If you have played *Out Run* then you've played *Cool Riders*, an unfortunately poor-controlling bike racer with a cool soundtrack

Cycles eating up players quarters, *Cool Riders* is just not up to par.
Rating: ★★

Rail Chase 2

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega

While hydrolic-powered chairs accompanying videogames smack of ticket-spewing kiddie games, Sega's developers have found the right game for the medium.

Rail Chase 2 is a runaway coalmine-cart game following set tracks through unusually creative polygon environments. You know, shoot everything — natives swinging through trees, monstrous tanks, a wild hive of bees, etc. But what was rather dull in the first game becomes challenging in the sequel: the movement of the chair synchronized with your constantly changing on-screen, first-person perspective (forward, backward, upside down) makes this closer to a roller-coaster ride with an uzl, adding a significant layer of complexity to a simplistic game.

The levels vary greatly — the Icelandic and jungle stages are especially imaginative and fun — various tracks can be chosen by shooting at the train stop sign, and the action never stops. This game is simple fun. Just like the arcades used to be.
Rating: ★★★

Rave Racer

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco

What is essentially the third in Namco's respected *Ridge Racer* series, *Rave Racer* is an upgrade on all accounts over its predecessors in few respects.

The improvements, however, are in all the right spots. Capable of up to four-player races, *Rave Racer*'s steering control emerges far superior, more accurate, and

much more responsive — using rumbling physical feedback in the steering wheel (like *Ridge Racer 1* and 2), than its kindred. This more responsive control enables drivers to pull off multiple power slides in the City course, or steer clearly through the snaking curves and tunnels of the Mountain course using a pinch of skill and practice, rather than having to compensate for poor control as in times past. "Ridge Racer" long and short courses are options, as well as the two standard views and automatic and manual transmission.

Little things add to the game's feel, like the quick-paced "rave" music; the silhouette of a dancing woman backed by multicolored spokes before entering the tunnel; and a secret tunnel that appears as you glide off one of the Mountain courses, funneling your racer back into the area. And despite only four courses, one of which is a rehash, this racer kicks.

Rating: ★★★★★



Virtually's *Zone Hunter* is one of the first VR games in the arcades, and it enables players to look, move, and shoot in any direction

Street Fighter Alpha: Warrior Dreams

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom

If die-hard game developers made games regardless of sales success (a luxurious idealism), it would be amazing to see the technical and visual progress a title like *Street Fighter* would make. But sales mean everything.



In typical M. Bison style, the flaming torpedo is quick and to the point in *Street Fighter Alpha*

Thus, the cool-style *Street Fighter Alpha: Warrior Dreams*. Despite similarities to past titles (bar *Street Fighter The Movie*), the mingling of new and former moves and characters (Charlie sure looks like Guile) means you've got the classic 2D fighter with all of its winning hallmarks.

Returning and/or new characters Sodom, Rose, Birdie, Adon, and Guy materialize in animation as fast and as comic book-like as Capcom's *Darkstalkers*, though using slightly different strategies (Chun-Li's cartwheel that turns into a helicopter kick is now capable of breaking through Ryu's power bursts), and capable of new super combinations — keep your eye on the power meter for "whaling" hits.

Capcom's right, in a way. *Street Fighter* only needs subtle changes for now; it's already got the most important thing: great gameplay.
Rating: ★★★

Virtua Striker

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega

If videogames could persuade Americans to play more soccer, then *Virtua Striker* is the game that'll do the trick.

Striker's delivery is amazingly well-rounded. Player control is smooth, accurate, and realistic in dribbling, passing, and shooting. The camera angle (placed at mid-field sideline) zooms in and out perfectly, neither too tight nor too far away, and though the game's pace is slower than others, your focus is never lost. Additionally, the game abounds in gorgeous texture-mapped, polygon players and backgrounds, delivering sophistication and sharp colors.

Adding to the realism is the defense. Unlike in other games,



Smooth, good-looking gameplay and tough AI make *Virtua Striker* a title very difficult to resist

when you slide for a steal, you don't automatically steal the ball (you often miss), and the goalies are often the best players on the field. Overall, the game is excellent to play and watch. You'll be screaming " *&#\$@? goal!" before you know it.
Rating: ★★★★★

Zone Hunter

Publisher: Virtuality
Developer: Virtuality

One of the first VR games in the arcades is *Zone Hunter*, a depressingly familiar Doom-styled first-person shooter.

It makes sense dollar-wise that Virtuality picked a *Doom* clone, seeing as how many people left their girlfriends, family, and jobs for hours of it's shock and fear-induced hit. But with all regards to *Zone Hunter*'s developers, the fact is this is a retreat, a stuttering, blurry, blasé, hype-induced bore. The only exception is that the medium is cool and full of potential; you can literally see, go, and shoot anywhere you want.

It's sad this game is neither as fun or playable as *Doom*, or as good looking as *Virtua Cop*, its closest kindred. But we're keen on future titles looking and playing better, and we're sure companies like Virtuality are, too.
Rating: ★★

Arcade

HOT DOG!

Alpine Racer

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco

Executing an original approach with its newest coin-op title, *Alpine Racer*, Namco has achieved something truly pleasing to see. Bringing snow into the arcade, that's one thing, stepping out on a limb with a single-player skiing game that looks more like a tread mill, well, that's also worth contemplating. But by being both an innovative new sports game and simulation, this title holds the strong potential to attract both sexes in equal measures.

NEXT Generation reporters were waiting in line behind both men and women eager to step up and try their legs on the steep polygonal, texture-mapped slopes, complete with moving gondolas, enchanting mountainous backdrops, mixed rock and icy stretches, and harrowingly steep passages that create a sense of dizziness and speed.

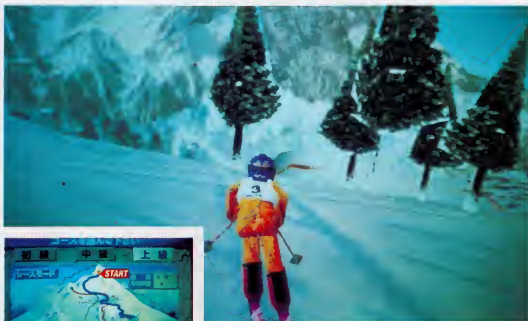
Certainly the most fun element about *Alpine Racer* is the way you play it — by shifting your weight from foot to foot. While grabbing two stationery ski poles, you step onto foot pedals which swing right and left and you pivot — or “edge” — up and down for sharper cut turns. Playing either Downhill or Slalom courses produces a quick skiing pace with relatively realistic physics, and is as close to skiing as we've seen in a game yet — lean forward, bend your knees, and push out to cut turns. And each course contains all the best elements: mogul runs, steep sheer cliffs, icy patches, beautiful three-dimensional alpine scenery, a mild snow storm, accurate sound effects, a pure delivery of speed, and 20- to 30-foot jumps (our favorite).

Because of its atypical approach and its success in execution, Namco's *Alpine Racer* makes the grade, and lowers the price of skiing in the process.

Rating: ★★★★★



Skiing either the Downhill or the Slalom course provides a fast downhill feeling, as rendered graphic 3D backgrounds speed by. If you fail, you tumble, roll, and get back up



Skiers race against time as well as each other. When beside an opponent, you can bump and pass him up

Dracula



The Hunt Continues



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NG Picks for

Once a month the experts at **NEXT Generation** team up with Electronics Boutique to bring you a list of the very best titles that gaming has to offer. These are the games every gamer must own to consider their home libraries complete. If you're looking for the latest games at reasonable prices, with great selection and customer service as an added bonus, don't hesitate to check out the helpful staff at your local Electronics Boutique. Here's this month's lineup...

Oct.'95

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PlayStation

Wipeout (Psygnosis) — Although it can't compare with *Destruction Derby* for sheer playability, *Wipeout*'s fantastic graphics and racing feel make it the second best title currently available for the PlayStation. Creative powerups like missiles, mines, and speed boosts round out the play experience, especially in the game's two-system link-up mode. This is futuristic racing at its best.

Rating: ★★★★★

Saturn

Daytona U.S.A. (Sega) — Still the best racing game available for the Saturn, *Daytona U.S.A.* shows off the technical wizardry of Sega's AM2 team with its smooth animation, realistic handling, and challenging track layouts. Many arcade purists still rate this one higher than the company's latest offering, *Sega Rally*. This is a must for all racing fans.

Rating: ★★★★★

Jaguar

Cannon Fodder (Virgin) — Virgin's remake of this classic Amiga bloodfest contains more strategy, action, and merciless violence than a rugby match on a minefield. A surprisingly intuitive interface, gruesome sound effects, and strong replay value will keep Jaguar players coming back again and again.

Rating: ★★★★★

3DO

Slam 'N' Jam (Crystal Dynamics) — One of the most powerfully playable sports titles to come out for any system, Crystal's *Slam 'N' Jam* is a game that can turn even non-believers into hard-core basketball fans. Made for action play, the game features in-your-face dunks, fast-paced team play, and full stats and substitutions. The best basketball game yet available.

Rating: ★★★★★

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PC

Virtual Pool (Interplay) — One of the most impressive games ever made from a technical standpoint, *Virtual Pool* features real world physics, multiple camera angles, and competitive play. Control is easy to learn and simulates as closely as possible the experience of playing real pool. This is a game that every PC owner should track down.

Rating: ★★★★★

Genesis

Virtua Fighter 32X (Sega) — Sega's translation of the wildly successful arcade game turns out to be one of the biggest surprises of the season. The 32X version of this game has all of the gameplay of the original, without any slowdown or polygon jumps. Smooth control, colorful graphics, and good old-fashioned fun.

Rating: ★★★★★

Super NES

Chrono Trigger (Square Soft) — The biggest cartridge-based RPG ever to be released from the masters of the fantasy adventure. Players take on the role of a reluctant time traveler as he journeys between six different time zones in an attempt to right wrongs throughout history. Multiple endings, creative character design and sheer size make this one of the best role-playing adventures ever.

Rating: ★★★★★

Platinum Pick

Destruction Derby (Psygnosis) — Although it's easy to get lost in *Destruction Derby's* startlingly realistic graphics, the game itself is one of the most addictive and playable titles ever made. Basically this game delivers all of the fun of most racing games, while enabling players to live out their most destructive fantasies. Multiple views, an all-out arena play mode, and crashes that result in realistic smoke and flying particles all add up to one fantastic game. This one really shows off what the PlayStation can do.

Rating: ★★★★★

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Deliver the letter, the sooner the better

Sam Tramiel says in **NG 7**: Top of page 8: "We're using hardware like Gillett does with razors ... We sell the razor for cost, or even below ..." In the pull quote on page 11: "If Sony comes in at \$299 or \$249 we'll ... have the ITC ... go after them. That's what's called dumping, and it's against the law."

Is it my imagination, or is the pot calling the kettle black?

Nick Porcino
Sanctuary Woods
nporcino@sol.uvic.ca

You're not the only one to spot this Nick...

I have a question or two in regard to the interview with the head of Atari, Sam Tramiel. In the article, he was quoted as saying that his company was willing to sell the Jaguar "at or below cost..." in order to get more market share. Fine. What I question is his comment concerning Sony's stated goal of releasing the PlayStation significantly below the cost of a Sega Saturn. He claims that that would be "dumping" and that his company will haul them before the Federal Trade Commission, or whomever is in charge of such matters. Now, is it just me, or does that sound like a healthy dose of **hypocritical posturing on Atari's part?** I would appreciate your analysis on this subject.

David Scott MacLachlan
Castine, ME 04420

Actually, there's a subtle difference between what Atari's doing and what Sam Tramiel anticipated Sony might do (in law, if not in spirit).

Any company can sell its goods for whatever price it wants — the law doesn't insist that companies make a profit. However, the "dumping" law concerns selling the same product in different places for dramatically different prices.

And, for the record, at the time of going to press Sony expressed "no concern" over Atari's threats.

I had to comment on the Sam Tramiel interview in the July Issue of **NEXT Generation** magazine. I hope Sam reads this magazine because it's time that he knows how this Jaguar owner feels. I bought my Jag in February of '94, as soon as it went on sale in my area. I was excited about the Jaguar. I still play my trusty 2600 and wanted to support the company that started it all. I have to admit, I was disappointed with *CyberMorph* at first (I have only now really started playing it). I was also disappointed with *Trevor McMur*.

It's sad that the disappointment never stopped. It is so sickening that after a year, there are, if we're lucky, 20 games available for the system. You stated that you want to keep development in-house. Well, you can't release games fast enough to just develop them yourselves. I've been as patient as I could. Now, I'm just pissed. You keep making promises you can't keep and it's catching up with you. Weren't we promised more than 50 games by Christmas of 1994? Or did we forget about that?

You need third party developers, like it or not! Atari itself has done little in the way of great-playing games to make the

Jag look appealing. The price point is great, the console has the capabilities, but oops! I forgot games need to play on it!

NG may be a little anti-Jag, but they are just reporting what they see. I'm a Jag owner, and I'm telling you like I see it. Do something now, or you'll never make it. You've lost my respect. Now earn it back.

Matt Solovey
Tyketto@aol.com

NEXT Generation is still receiving hundreds of letters in response to the Atari's Boss Talks Back interview with Sam Tramiel in **NG 7**. If you missed it, check out how to get a back issue on page 32. And, for the record, seemingly 99% of all related correspondence asked what illegal substances were being consumed during the interview, and where similar artifacts might be purchased...

I'm guessing that the reviewer who wrote "the brilliant, simple and addictive classic Macintosh game has returned" (*Macintosh Lode Runner* review, finals, p73, **NG 8**) meant the Apple II. Daniel Perry
dperryda@sol.acs.uwosh.edu

P.S. In response to the Amiga fan who complained in issue 7 about the use of the phrase "You've come a long way baby" because it was an Amiga slogan; he must care little that it was a slogan for Virginia Slims before the Amiga stole it. Oh, yeah, and the guy feels offended that you use an "Amiga" (stolen) slogan for a review of an Atari product, when it is, in fact, an Activision product

for PCs. I don't know what Atari has to do with that equation.

See? All you "console kids" out there — listen and take note. You think that the Super NES vs. Genesis squabbling got pretty heated, eh? You think that Jaguar owners and 3DO owners know how to throw down, eh? You ain't seen nothin'. You should have seen the old Commodore versus Atari days, now that was fighting, etc., etc.

In the E' show coverage (**NG 7**) you describe the Jaguar VR as follows: "...**NEXT Generation** has learned the system being demonstrated was nothing other than Virtuality's own arcade system disguised as Jaguar VR."



At E' in LA, Atari used Virtuality's VR system to promote its upcoming headset due this fall

Although that's true, you shouldn't try to make an embarrassing secret you've just uncovered. Atari reps admitted to anyone who asked that it wasn't yet Jaguar-powered. You also failed to mention that another prototype was running on Jaguar hardware. This was the machine Atari was showing in the back rooms with an early version of *Missile Command VR*.

Tony Belding
Tony.Belding@yaxa.aargate.com

Come off it Tony. At E! Atari had a giant stand with a giant sign saying "Jaguar VR," underneath which there was a (Jaguar-colored) VR headset for people to try out. At no point were people led to believe that the VR headset they were trying out was anything other than the genuine Atari VR unit. And although "Atari representatives admitted that it wasn't yet Jaguar powered," you had to ask: That's the whole point.

Hello, my name is Gerry Kaufhold. I was the only industry analyst invited to speak at the first ever 3DO Developer's Conference held in San Jose in 1992. About half the audience was made up of Philips CD-i developers looking to port their titles to any other machine!

In my presentation at the 3DO conference, I described a product called the "Leisure Time Consumer Video Machine" that used CD-ROM as a medium, and connected to a television set for viewing/playback. I showed several growth curves for unit volume shipments, versus "street pricing." One of my final warnings to Trip Hawkins was: Make note of this fact, Trip — "80% of the units of all consumer electronics items have a retail price of under \$300 (US). This includes television sets, compact disc players, VCRs, home stereos, Walkmans, and videogames! If 3DO wants to become the next generation gaming standard, you absolutely must target an intro price point of less than \$300 and be prepared to drop below \$200 within 18 months!"

You could have heard a pin drop in the auditorium. I spoke on the first day of the conference. The second day when Trip and the engineers showed product preview demos. At that time, Trip showed his "early adopter" charts that supported his contention that \$700 was the proper introductory price point. He missed out on some details: early adopters of VCRs did pay more than \$700, but this market took more than three years to obtain nearly 1 million units sold; and in the game industry, three years is an entire generation.

There is a historical note about Trip Hawkins not understanding price-point issues. When he was a product manager for the Apple Lisa computer, he firmly believed that there was a price point between what workstation vendors were charging and what desktop personal computer companies were selling. Workstations (from DEC, IBM, etc.) went for \$12,000 and up. At that time, PCs were around \$3,000 (Cromemco, Kaypro, etc.). Trip fought for and won a price point for the Lisa at around \$7,500. The problem was, the market either wanted a workstation (for \$12,000) or a Desktop PC (for \$3,000). The market did NOT have a product category defined for \$7,500. Trip ignored this, and pushed the Lisa out the door and into oblivion.

Trip Hawkins is a wonderful promoter. He should be working for the SF Giants and the Oakland As — helping them to bring back attendance. Trip can promote himself really well, but he shouldn't be in charge of a complex entity such as a next generation gaming company.

**Mr. Gerry Kaufhold, Vice President, ThorK Research
73700.3056@compuserve.com**

Thanks for your letter, Gerry (it arrived before the recent announcement of 3DO's latest price drop). It will certainly be interesting to see how the \$299 3DO fares in the face of competition from a \$299 PlayStation (our sources have suggested a \$249 will be Panasonic and Goldstar's response).

While looking over your "Talent Wanted" ad in your magazine, I noticed your favor of *Super Mario 3* over the new and highly acclaimed game *Donkey Kong Country*. It struck me as unusual for such a statement to be made, but was pleased with the "dare" to defend DK's honor. I, being an avid gamer and an employee in a software/TV game department, feel that it is my duty and responsibility to defend both Donkey and Diddy.

Donkey Kong is pure, all natural ape. He doesn't eat a leaf

and turn into another animal who can fly or eat a flower and shoot bouncing fireballs from his



Adam Holden defends his belief that Donkey Kong Country is superior to Super Mario 3

hands. He is not selfish, understanding that there are times when Diddy can handle a certain situation much better than he can. Donkey Kong understands that in order to move forward he must sometimes move backward to regain his strength and recuperate. Donkey Kong uses the help of fellow jungle mates to move easily succeed, because even DK knows that two heads are better than one.

And this Mario guy, his game plan is about as bad as his accent. Sure, he has his brother with him, but you and I know that Luigi would (if he's not already) stick the Princess whenever Mario isn't looking.

**Adam Holden
QTCalvin@aol.com**

What we actually asked for in the ad was "someone who knows why *Super Mario Bros 3* on the NES is a better game than *Donkey Kong Country* on the Super NES — or someone who can convince us otherwise." There's a subtle difference.

Anyway, you came close. But then you went ahead and blew it at the end.

Thanks to everybody who took the time and the effort to reply to the "Talent Wanted" ad. The response has been overwhelming. The position, however, is now filled.

I want to commend you for the consistent quality of your magazine. Once a student of journalism, I find **NEXT Generation's** no-nonsense style a welcome change from the uninformed trash the other magazines produce.

However, your magazine has one flaw in it that makes it fall short of the kind of quality seen in a good newspaper or news magazine. This flaw is your love of Sony and its PlayStation, and the insidious presence of this love throughout your magazine.

From a technological aspect, the PlayStation does indeed look like it is capable of producing games that are superior to any games on competing platforms. But it doesn't matter that you are correct, these plugs for Sony simply don't belong in some of your articles. In articles that directly compare the consoles, articles that discuss the competitiveness of a certain console, such mentions are understandable. But in articles that are simply discussing an announcement made by a company or general news about a company, these mentions degrade the journalistic integrity you seem to strive for.

Since the magazine is entirely about videogames, all articles interrelate in a way. But these mentions of Sony serve only to degrade the impact of the articles about Sega, Nintendo, or 3DO. As a videogame news magazine, articles should be simply presenting information for readers. These mentions effectively editorialize the articles into a Sony slant.

I believe that it is the responsibility of the editor to identify these plugs and remove them. Writers will always have an opinion, and it is up to the journalist himself to try to prevent these slips. However, in the end, it is ultimately up to the editor to keep this kind of thing out of the magazine.

**Van Nguyen
vanhn@ocf.berkeley.edu**

We've printed this letter for two reasons: 1) it's not from "Mr Jaguar," or "An Angry Sega Fan." 2) Van Nguyen presents a lucid accusation of bias that we want to address here.

Nearly 99% of all the accusations of bias come from an "outraged" minority of system owners. There's an instinctual reaction to defend your system

corresponding

of choice against all criticism, no matter how fair it may be. Every time we print an encouraging story about Sega, we get letters of complaint from 3DO and Jaguar owners. Every time we say something good about 3DO, Sega owners ask us how much Trip Hawkins paid us, etc.

NEXT Generation has, at various times, been accused of bias against every system (even Sony calls us up every now and again to complain about something we've written). The truth is that we genuinely try to keep an open mind, but that some facts are incontestable. PlayStation is more powerful than Jaguar and 3DO — that's a fact. Sega knows more about making good software than Sony — that's a fact. And so on.

Your statement that "Since the magazine is entirely about videogames, all articles interrelate in a way" is the understatement of the year. One of **NEXT Generation's** primary functions is to cut through the hype of press releases, find the real story, and in short, provide context. That's the key word. And that requires explaining how individual pieces of news fit into the overall jigsaw puzzle, which requires mention of competing systems.

Don't worry. We're not in Sony's pocket (or anyone else's for that matter). We're committed to bringing you the truth, and that's what we're going to continue doing.

I just wanted to say that overall, you do have a better mag than *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, however, I also have to say that **EGM** looks better than your mag. You have much better picture quality, but your borders and format need some help. Thanks,

Bradley
S001BYO@Desire.
Wright.Edu

Wow. Deja Vu. Didn't we sort this one out a couple of months ago? But really, thanks Bradley.

Just give us a couple of months and our "borders and format" will be every damn bit as good as *Electronic Gaming*

Monthly's are, if not better, goddamnit. Just you watch.

I want to compliment you on the balance displayed in **NEXT Generation** #8 [August]. On the one hand, you had a rather dry interview with the (by his own admission) nontechnical Howard Lincoln,



Yu Suzuki, head of the Sega AM2 team, will be interviewed in an upcoming **NEXT Generation**

and on the other hand, you printed a few sizzling comments from Yu Suzuki. I can just imagine how interesting this issue would have been had you devoted as much editorial space to Yu Suzuki as you did to Howard Lincoln.

IReplay@aol.com

Yu Suzuki is scheduled to get the full **NEXT Gen** interview treatment in a future issue.

I was considering getting a subscription to **NEXT Generation** magazine because of the Atari Jaguar coverage that I have seen so far. But in your July issue 07 on page 7, Atari President Talks Back, you wrote "While remaining open minded, **NEXT Generation** has never been a big fan of Jaguar." Well, I am a big fan of the Atari Jaguar and I am looking for a magazine that will give me true information on the Jaguar and be a little more open minded. I don't see why you don't like the Jaguar, it's the only 64-bit game system in the world. Atari, also unlike its competitors is a small company, and though small, it gives the larger companies a run for their money! So try to give Atari a little more credit.

Matthew Minalga
Math32690@aol.com

Mathew, we don't judge a system on how big the company that

produces it is. And just because we're not a big fan doesn't mean that we won't give the Jaguar a fair hearing. See the answer to Van Nguyen's letter on the previous page.

I really love your finals articles for the PC. But could you cover more shareware games? Don't forget that shareware games are becoming the biggest market for games, so, imagine if a mag would review these games even before they are released! (\$\$\$) berube@dm.usher.ca

Sorry Ben. Presently there just isn't enough editorial space. Besides, the whole point of shareware games is that you get to try them before you buy them — so you don't need us to review them for you.

I n NG 8, it was stated that a US [Sega] Saturn cannot play Japanese Saturn games unless a rocker switch is installed by "taking a soldering iron and a pair of wire clippers to the innards of the machine." Such major surgery is unnecessary. US Sega Saturn owners (like myself) can play Japanese Saturn games by using Datel's Universal Adapter cartridge. When it's inserted in the cart port, Saturn's software lockout scheme is disabled.

Retailers that specialize in Japanese videogames sell the Saturn adapter for around \$80; they also sell similar adapters for the Genesis and Super Nintendo. The stores that sell these adapters don't mention them in their print advertisement, so gamers who want to purchase one should call around to see if any adapters are currently available. Don't bother with the major software chains, though; they won't touch this.

Scott Blumenfeld
Boca Raton, FL

News of Datel's new adapter reached us too late for the last issue. If you're having trouble locating one, call the trouble Tomo, at (818) 839-8755, where it is sold for \$60 per unit, and

make sure you told 'em **NEXT Generation** sent ya. Datel, the manufacturer of these devices, can be reached (in an extreme case) in the UK at 011 44 1 782 744-182.

I have recently become confused as to how I should regard your magazine. Is **NEXT Gen** a source of information to the public, or a dedicated media source for the "mega-companies" who are trying to peddle their systems? (This is a question, not an accusation.)

You stated that the intention of your magazine was to "report" comments, not "censor" them. However, you also previously stated that your magazine "is devoted to delivering detailed news coverage on the industry's leading-edge hardware and software..." (NG 6). As readers, we depend on you for straight info, we cannot make our own judgments when we are misinformed in the first place. I am not suggesting that you censor your interviews, but perhaps it would be beneficial to the reader if you were to follow them up your with commentaries elaborating on issues, or expressed other view-points.

Gary Lozinski
Vancouver, B.C., Canada

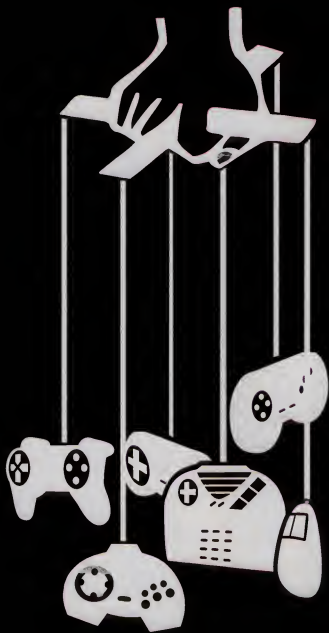
Of course, we can't go back and "correct" interviewees quotes. Where possible, we will try and pick up "mistruhs" (or "extensions of reality" as Bing Gordon describes them on page 6, NG 9) during the interview. Even this isn't always practical, and CEOs of companies being what they are, it's often best to just let them talk, thereby giving them enough rope with which to hang themselves.

C an you give the address of the publishers of the Atari book, *Phoenix*?

Don Messerli
messerli@inet.dpt.com

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Next Month**Who really runs the game industry?**

Exposed: the top 75 movers and shakers in the world's game industry. Hardware manufacturers, game creators, corporate leaders, money men, marketing evangelists — they're all here. And now that we've dragged them all here, may we politely suggest that — for the sake of the game industry — they don't all take the same flight back again...

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